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# **The Educational Needs of Gifted Children**

**by**

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of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study assesses the extent to which the educational needs of a group of very able Year 10 students reflect the perceived educational needs of gifted children as drawn from a study of the literature.

In consultation with their teachers, fifteen students from five schools in two counties were selected to take part in the research. Using the case-study method, these students, their parents and teachers were interviewed. The information collected from their parents and teachers was used mainly for the process of triangulation.

Letters were sent to all who were involved in the research in any capacity, explaining what the research was about and inviting them to participate in the project or seeking permission to approach others where this was necessary. There was eventually a full complement of interested and co-operative participants. Those interviewed gave responses which were very useful to the research and raised some unexpected and very interesting issues.

Interview schedules were used and, to facilitate comparisons in the responses, the schedules for the students, parents and teachers were very similar. The responses of all three groups have been compiled into a series of tables and these and bar graphs illustrate the extent to which students' parents' and teachers' responses were in accord.

The conclusions drawn from the study are that, in general, there was a good correspondence in the needs of this particular group of students with those needs in the list drawn from the literature and their needs were largely being met by their schools. However, some of the perceived needs were not confirmed as such for this group and there was a variation in emphasis in some of their identified needs. A number of issues also emerged suggesting needs which were not included in the original list. An especially interesting example of these was the part played by in-family role models, especially older sibling rival / role models, who appeared to have been very important in the motivation and achievement of some students. All the issues which emerged which were not included in the original list of perceived needs would make interesting topics for further research.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of the gifted, and especially with regard to making special or appropriate educational provision for them, in world terms has existed for thousands of years. For example, as pointed out by Passow et al., (1993) Plato in Greece and Confucius in China both discussed “heavenly” (gifted) children. They attempted to explain giftedness theoretically, made suggestions for the identification of the gifted, for their selection and “for nurturing them in society” (p.884).

Compared with countries like North America, Britain has been slow to establish this as an important issue at influential levels. Until recently this was, to an extent, because it had a low priority at government level but also because attitudes to helping the gifted sometimes made it difficult to promote this issue, even in those areas where special efforts to do so were being made. There are still those who believe that there is no real need to do anything special for the gifted, that they can cope and achieve very well without any special provision and there are even some who are quite opposed to making such provision for them. This is discussed in some detail later.

For three principal reasons I feel that an awareness of the particular educational needs of the gifted and especially meeting those needs is vitally important. Firstly I feel very strongly that they are entitled to an equal opportunity with all other pupils to a curriculum which will allow them to maximise their abilities and as nearly as possible reach their full potential. Secondly there is evidence from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) inspections that “if you are willing to deal effectively with the needs of able pupils you will raise the achievements of all pupils” (Tomlinson, cited in Eyre, 1998b p.28). This to me is a very powerful argument in support of provision for this group. Thirdly, by neglecting the gifted you run the risk of their abilities never developing to the full,

with the consequent loss of these to themselves and society and we cannot afford to lose such an important national resource as this fund of gifts and talents. Gallagher (1993) in referring to this issue sums up the situation very well and although he is referring specifically to America, the comments could equally well be applied to Britain:

“Gifted behaviour may still be seen as an uncomfortable presence, as well as a great advantage. However, increasingly it can be seen that to deny its presence in youth is done at the nation’s peril. America is neither so rich, nor blessed with natural resources, that, as a nation, it can afford to ignore educationally the human potential that is embedded in the minds of our gifted students.

This generation will place its signature upon the poetry, the science, the art, and the business prosperity of the next generation, in large measure, by how enthusiastically (sic) is the response to the educational challenge of these students” (p.767).

Currently in the world of education in Britain, whatever views and sentiments there may be opposed to making provision to meet the educational needs of the gifted, this has now become a high profile issue. Prior to this it had been, as noted, something of a low priority area especially in terms of government funded research, education initiatives and legislation.

### **Recent history of government attitudes to educational provision for the gifted**

While not generous, there was nevertheless some government funding in the past for research, such as that carried out by Ogilvie (1973) on gifted children in primary schools and by Denton and Postlethwaite (1985) on the effectiveness of teacher identification of able pupils. However, there was no really significant state funding for research on the gifted and their education and probably because of this there has been relatively little such research carried out in Britain compared with some countries, most notably America. Montgomery (1996) comments on this that “Research grants can be



calculated in thousands of pounds in Britain, whereas funding in North America for gifted children (and all other education) is allocated in millions” (p.xi).

Although not numerous, there were also government documents, reports and other references to the gifted in official publications. Documents specifically about the gifted included, for example, a Department of Education and Science (DES) publication *Gifted Children and their Education* by Hoyle and Wilks (1975) and the DES (1977) *Gifted Children in Middle and Comprehensive Schools*. More recent examples include the HMI (1992) document *The Education of Very Able Children in Maintained Schools*, and a Department for Education (DFE) (1994) document on *Exceptionally Able Children*.

References to the gifted or able were also made in a number of other documents, for example in the Plowden Report (cited in Montgomery, 1996a) where it said that “long term studies should be made on the needs and achievements of gifted children” (p.308). More recently in the White Paper Choice and Diversity (1992) it was stated that “The Government firmly believes that education within the maintained sector should provide for children of all abilities including the most able” (p.12).

When the National Curriculum (1988) was introduced it made no specific mention of the gifted or very able, although it did underline the importance of differentiation in the curriculum and meeting the needs of the individual. An oblique reference to the able is made in the revised National Curriculum (1995) where a common access statement for all subjects refers to the use material from later key stages for those who may need such provision for their progress and to demonstrate their achievement. Furthermore within each National Curriculum subject attainment target there is a level of exceptional performance, allowing for recognition of the high ability and achievements of gifted children. So gifted children’s needs could be seen as having been to an extent taken into account in the National Curriculum.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) seemed to be particularly anxious to promote the cause of the gifted and should be given credit for raising awareness of this issue in many schools and Local Education Authorities (LEAs). In the joint National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) and Department for Employment and Education (DfEE) (1995) document on more able children, which was addressed to school governors, it was pointed out that “Ofsted considers the needs of able pupils as part of equality of opportunity and therefore during the inspection process inspectors will look for evidence of appropriate provision at whole school and classroom level” (P.16). Many of their reports noted that there was inadequate provision for the able in the schools inspected and it was recommended that the schools should address this issue.

### **Current government attitudes to educational provision for the gifted**

It is interesting that in spite of all the efforts described and findings and recommendations that related issues needed to be addressed, there still was no legislation or major DfEE initiative to promote appropriate provision for the gifted until the present government came into power. Very shortly after this event a White Paper, Excellence in Schools, was produced (1997) and the gifted were specifically mentioned several times with the telling comment made that “all schools should seek to create an atmosphere in which to excel is not only acceptable but desirable” (p.39). Ways of increasing opportunities for the most able or talented pupils were also proposed. This was followed two years later by the Excellence in Cities (1999) initiative, which was aimed at raising standards in the inner cities secondary schools generally but which gave considerable emphasis to the gifted and talented, and announced the intention of extending opportunities for this group such as in provision of university summer schools. This initiative has been very generously funded.

In 1999 a House of Commons Education and Employment Committee Fourth Report was devoted exclusively to “Highly Able Children”. In this the intention was expressed to extend the Excellence in Cities (1999) initiative nationally, with the unequivocal statement that “The Government is committed to developing and implementing a national strategy for the education of gifted and talented children” (p.iii). It also said that the Government planned to ensure that all national policies and initiatives would include where appropriate “a focus on the needs of gifted and talented children” (p.iii). This has been honoured, as evidenced by the publication, for example, of a guidance document on teaching able children in the literacy and numeracy strategies and the recent National Curriculum (2000). In this document in the section on inclusion it is recommended that:

“For pupils whose attainments significantly exceed the expected level of attainment within one or more subjects during a particular key stage, teachers will need to plan suitably challenging work. As well as drawing on materials from later key stages or higher levels of study, teachers may plan further differentiation by extending the breadth and depth of study” (p.31).

Related to the Excellence in Cities scheme, funding for Summer Schools for the gifted and talented 10 to 14 year old pupils was offered on a national scale in the year 2000. This scheme is being continued for 2001. My one criticism of this is that, in the interests of giving opportunities to discover unrecognised abilities, I would like to see the scheme open for pupils to opt into rather than their being selected for these, but from a funding point of view perhaps this is unrealistic.

Very recently there has been publication of a DfEE Green Paper (2001) Building on Success, which is a consultation document in which there is quite a lot of reference to the gifted and talented and ways in which provision will be made for them. The intention to extend the Excellence in Cities scheme to “include 1000 schools and one-

third of all secondary pupils by September 2001” (p.7) is also noted. There are now many other ways associated with these initiatives in which attempts are being made to meet the needs of gifted and talented and many more schemes are ‘in the pipeline’ for the future.

Ofsted remains firmly in the picture with the document *Inspecting Schools* (2000) noting that in judging standards of work and pupils’ achievements inspectors “should consider, where relevant, the extent to which: . . . pupils . . . who are gifted and talented, are making good progress” (p.36).

### **Final comments**

After a long wait and much lobbying by a number of interested and dedicated people it is gratifying to have the cause of gifted children given ‘formal recognition’. This kind of indication at official level or ‘from the top’ is necessary to give such an issue credibility and to ensure widespread commitment to it, and the associated funding is also important in attitudes to its acceptance. Freeman (1995b) sums all this up very well in commenting: “impetus for change is heavily influenced by those who hold ultimate power” (p.189). It is to be hoped that those in power, of whatever political persuasion, will continue to support these very important initiatives which appear, so far, to have been successful and that they will be willing to provide the necessary funding needed for continued success. I would like to think that my own research on the educational needs of gifted children will also make some contribution, however small, in promoting the cause of appropriate provision to meet these needs.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS**

It is necessary in a study of this nature to make decisions as to how the group of students will be referred to and also how they will be defined. The issue of definitions is given a considerable amount of space in the literature and so, following comments on terminology, there will be a more detailed discussion on definitions, tracing their development historically and including a suggested definition which is appropriate for this study.

#### **Terminology**

There is no one recognised and generally accepted terminology for this group, although gifted is used more than any other by writers and researchers on this topic. Exceptionally able, very able, bright, highly able, able learners and more able are also amongst the terminology used, and only sometimes are distinctions drawn between them.

The confusion or ambivalence about which terminology to use is well illustrated by a House of Commons Education and Employment Committee Fourth Report (1999). In the title the group is referred to as 'Highly Able Children' and within this document reference is also made to the most able and to the gifted and talented in referring to the same broad group of children. The confusion also shows in the various publications by Freeman in which she refers to this group as gifted (1979, 1991) talented (1995a) and very able (1998). In the latter she makes the comment that "as almost all international researchers use the term gifted it would be verging on the deviant to avoid it" (p.1).

For the purposes of this research I have used the terminology gifted in the title because this is the term most used in the literature. In my presentation of results, since there is no generally accepted terminology, I have used mainly the term very able because I felt, from my own experience, that in the world of education this would be a more acceptable and less emotive term to use. However, in my review of the literature I shall use the terminology as used by each writer/researcher that I mention and will propose a working definition that I feel is relevant to the group of students involved in this research.

### **Definitions and Theories of Giftedness**

The question of definition is even more confused, with Freeman (1995a) commenting that there are more than one hundred definitions of giftedness alone. It is the subject of much debate, with large areas of the literature devoted to it. Some of the would-be definitions are more in the form of theories of giftedness, what it involves and how it is manifest, from which definitions of giftedness can be derived.

Definitions of giftedness are inextricably related to the concept of intelligence which is equally complex and to which again there is no universal agreement as to a precise definition. Quite often intelligence is expressed as a score achieved in an intelligence test, which typically allows the calculation of an intelligence quotient (IQ). However, this is criticised by some such as Gardner (1983), who suggest that it predicts nothing more than success in school-type achievement. Montgomery (1996a) states that “the most widely held view currently is that intelligence is ‘*a general problem-solving ability*’” (p.30), with intelligence test items centring on verbal, numerical and spatial reasoning questions. These comments suggest a narrow view of intelligence, ignoring many other kinds of abilities.

In the literature on giftedness some writers in discussing definitions take a broadly historical approach, starting with some of the earliest definitions and tracing

the trends in views through to the present. I shall follow this format which will also allow discussion of different categories of definition and some of the issues surrounding them.

The earliest definitions of giftedness were mostly based on intelligence test scores which were derived from psychometric tests, this representing what is termed a uni-dimensional view of ability. In time, as views and theories about the nature of intelligence changed and developed so the definitions and theories of giftedness also moved away from this early model to become correspondingly more complex and multi-dimensional.

### **Uni-dimensional definitions and models of giftedness**

In 1921 Terman (1925) started the first and what was to become the best known large-scale longitudinal study of gifted children. He selected a group of children in schools in urban California, average age 11 years old, with the ultimate deciding criterion for inclusion being a score of IQ 140+ on the Stanford-Binet test. However, some, for example siblings, were admitted to the group later with an IQ range of 135 – 139. Using this method of selection he was hoping to find children “of a degree of brightness which would rate them well within the top one percent of the school population” (Terman, 1925, p.19).

Terman was, therefore, essentially defining his gifted children as those with an IQ score of 135 or above on an intelligence test. He felt that his results from his 35-year follow-up studies (Terman and Oden 1959) showed that a high IQ is a reliable predictor or even determinant of outstanding success in adult life.

In the years immediately following the start of the Terman study the IQ measure gained popularity. It became and to an extent it still is widely used for determining differences in levels of mental ability and in defining giftedness. It has been quite extensively used as at least as a part of the criteria for selecting children for studies of the gifted, for example, Pringle (1970), Tempest (1974), and Gross (1993).

However, this uni-dimensional view of ability/giftedness, where a general intelligence measurable by an IQ test dominated cognitive abilities, was challenged, as was the idea of an inherited and measurable intelligence as a dominant factor in determining likely success and achievement. There was a growing body of opinion that environment has at least as much influence on these. There are now those who take the view that the dominant influence on achievement comes from the person's environment, for example, Ceci (1996) and Howe (1990, 1995).

Although Terman (1925) did recognise some environmental influence in his follow-up studies as noted, nevertheless his research and findings still attributed IQ with being a predictor or determinant of success and these findings have been challenged, especially by those who feel that environment is a major factor in achievement. Largely because of this emphasis on IQ, in recent years especially, there has been much criticism of Terman's research for example by Ceci (1996). He found an account of an informal study carried out by Sorokin (cited in Ceci, 1996) which compared Terman's gifted group with children from the same social group, taking all social factors into account. Sorokin's conclusions were that the Terman group were no more successful than they would have been if randomly selected on the basis of their family social backgrounds *irrespective* of IQ.

While the literature on the gifted and talented strongly supports the influence of environmental factors and especially the home background on the development of high ability, (Freeman 1993, 1995, 1998; Pringle, 1970; Gomme 2000), nevertheless, a very balanced view is taken in most cases, with the acceptance that both innate ability and environmental factors are important in the development and realisation of potential. Feldhusen (1996) for example, having studied the relevant literature, argues that "emerging abilities derive from genetic potential interacting with home, school, culture, and peer influences" (p.125).



## **Multi-dimensional definitions/models of giftedness**

Some early studies indicated a recognition of other cognitive factors in addition to general intelligence as being influential in high achievement. Hollingworth (1942) started her work on highly intelligent children in 1926 and while she used the criterion of IQ 180 to categorise the group she worked with, she nevertheless recognised that such children could have greater strengths in some areas than others and these she called special abilities.

During the same period, in 1927 Spearman (cited in Vernon et al., 1977) outlined his theory that there was a general underlying ability which is fundamental to a greater or lesser extent to all performances. However, in addition to this 'g' factor he recognised the existence of other abilities in suggesting that every different performance involved a specific ability which he referred to as the 's' factor, particular to that task only.

Through the following years of the early twentieth century much research was done and various theories produced which further broadened ideas as to the nature and structure of intelligence. De Haan and Havinghurst (1957) produced a list of talents which they saw as constituting giftedness in children. Theirs was one of the earliest attempts to produce a multi-dimensional definition and theory of giftedness and one which included both creativity and non-cognitive factors. Their definition stated that:

“We shall consider any child “gifted” who is superior in some ability that can make him an outstanding contributor to the welfare of, and quality of living in, society” (p.1).

They listed six areas of ability / talent which included intellectual ability, (as demonstrated in academic aptitude), creative thinking, scientific ability, social leadership, mechanical skill or ingenuity and talent in fine arts areas. General intelligence was firmly in place with a statement to the effect that it was basic to the various skills and abilities listed other than creative thinking. Montgomery (1996a)

suggests their ideas were inspired by Guilford's (cited in Montgomery, 1996a) three dimensional model of intellect in which a divergent operation is included. Divergent thinking, she points out, was at that time a term used synonymously with creativity, which, as noted, was included in De Haan and Havinghurst's (1957) list of talents.

Following the shock to America of losing the 'Space Race' to Russia in 1957, schools were blamed for failing to provide an adequate education for their gifted students, including for their lack of emphasis on creativity (Tannenbaum 1983, 1993; Cropley 1995). This precipitated a great deal of interest and research in creativity.

As in the case of intelligence, "no consensus exists, however, about how to define creativity" (Fleith, 2000, p.148). Cropley, drawing on the work of several researchers, notes that early theories equated intelligence with convergent thinking and creativity with divergent thinking, that is different thinking styles. He explains that the convergent thinker is seen as relating a new situation to the familiar, reapplying what has already been learned and using proven tactics while the divergent thinker uses intuition, takes chances and searches for the novel. He suggests that most people tend towards "a greater or lesser degree of divergence / convergence according to the particular situation" (p.104), that is the two styles are not mutually exclusive. He believes true giftedness is a combination of conventional abilities and creative abilities as described by Facoaru's (cited in Cropley, 1995) whose studies, he says, suggested that:

"talented achievement depends on a combination of conventional abilities (good memory, logical thinking, knowledge of facts, accuracy, etc.) and creative abilities (generating ideas, recognising alternative possibilities, seeing unexpected combinations, having the courage to try the unusual, and so on). (Cropley, 1995, p.101).

Other descriptions of what constitutes creativity and definitions of this are many and some very complex and there will be further reference to and examples of these in the chapter on needs.

The very influential 1971 Marland Report “Education of the Gifted and Talented”, (cited in Piirto,1999), produced by the Federal Government of the United States of America, was a conscious official attempt to move ideas away from the use of the IQ score as a single means of defining giftedness and talent. In this gifted children were regarded as those capable of high performance in any one or any combination of six areas of ability. These are virtually identical to those produced a short time later in Britain by Ogilvie (1973), who said that “The term gifted is used to indicate any child who is outstanding in either a general or specific ability in a relatively broad or narrow field of endeavour” (p.7). He did, nevertheless, also refer to the use of a test score for defining giftedness. His list of ability areas includes high intelligence, creativity, outstanding leadership / social awareness, visual and performing arts, physical talent and mechanical ingenuity.

Despite the growing interest in the impact of the environment on development of abilities as described earlier, none of these models / definitions mentioned takes environmental factors into account other than the very briefest reference to parental encouragement by De Haan and Havinghurst (1957). Neither are they included in the definition proposed shortly afterwards, in 1978, by Renzulli (1986). In his three ring model he defines giftedness as consisting of above average ability, creativity and task commitment interacting together. In above average ability he includes both general abilities such as are “usually measured by tests of general aptitude or intelligence” (p.66) and specific abilities. He envisages these elements as three interlocking circles, with the gifted behaviour occurring where the three overlap, suggesting that gifted and talented children are those who possess and can develop these abilities and apply them to an area of human performance that is potentially valuable.

While including creativity as equally important to high ability, Renzulli’s theory has been criticized by a number of writers and researchers for the inclusion of task commitment. Shore et al. (1991) point out that while task commitment is useful it is not necessarily an indication of giftedness. They argue that it is something that

children can be helped to develop. Gross (1993) also points out that his model does not take account of underachievers who can be very able but quite demotivated, and do not usually exhibit task commitment.

Mönks and Boxtel (1986) also criticise Renzulli's (1986) model for the inclusion of task commitment but on other grounds too. Based on his model they produced a modified version which they call the Triadic Model of giftedness and feel it takes account of the impact of certain environmental factors on development of abilities, this not accounted for in Renzulli's model. They enclose Renzulli's three inter-locking rings within a triangle, placing school, peers and home at the points of the triangle and outside the circles. Mönks (cited in Montgomery, 1996) later describes this as a multifactorial model of giftedness (Figure 1).

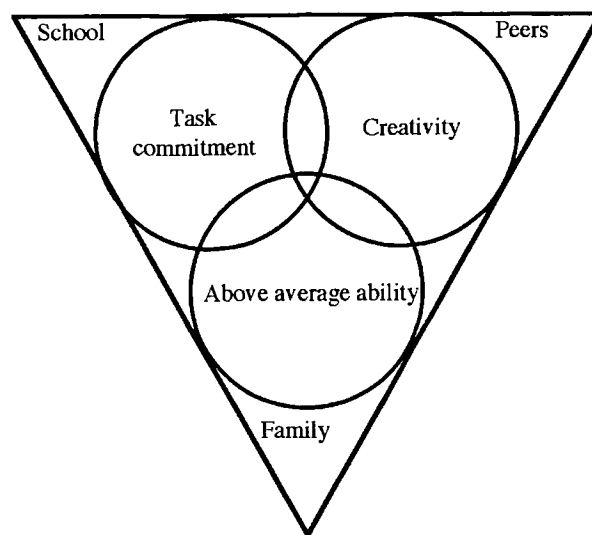


Figure 1: Mönks: *A multifactorial model of giftedness*

Of the recent models / theories of giftedness, Gagné's (1993) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent is one of the most comprehensive and according to Piirto (1999), "has had significant influence on the latest thinking in the field of talent development" (p.28) (Figure 2).

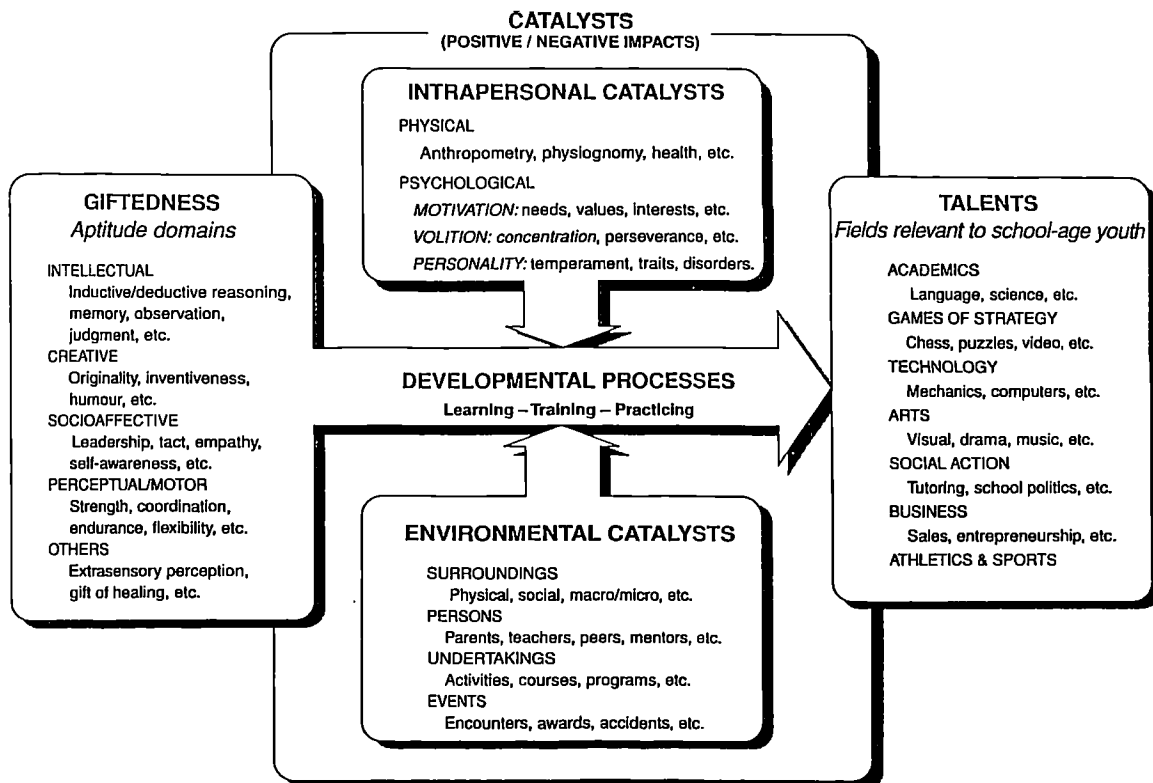


Figure 2: Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

Gagné (1993) sees giftedness as taking the form of competence that is well above average in aptitude domains. He suggests that the interaction of these with various environmental and intrapersonal catalysts, working together with “systematic learning and extensive practice” (p.72) will result in the emergence of a particular talent. This is manifest in performance which is well above average in one or more areas of human activity. His model includes all the elements discussed, with a strong emphasis on the influence of environmental factors in all their forms, as well as personality and motivation. It also allows for development of specific talents / abilities, some of those he includes being less commonly mentioned, such as business talent.

Although Gardner (1983) was not originally concerned with proposing a definition or model of giftedness, his theory of multiple intelligences has had a great impact on the world of education generally, and there are few texts on educating gifted children that do not make reference to his theory. This theory is diametrically opposed to the idea of a unitary general intelligence which can be measured by psychometric tests. Instead he views human ability as taking the form of originally seven, now nine (1999) distinct intelligences, including linguistic, musical, spatial, mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist and spiritual. These, while capable of interacting, are nevertheless independent of one another, so that a person can be gifted in any one of these areas of intelligence. Gardner’s theory has been criticised by Mönks and Mason (1993) on the grounds that it is “based on anecdotal findings rather than empirical results” (p.92).

Many other definitions of the gifted and talented are offered which are not attached to models of giftedness. More recent examples of these tend to be very broad in nature and would come into the category of multi-dimensional definitions. A broadly based definition is that of Freeman (1998) who sees the very able as:

“those who demonstrate exceptionally high-level performance, whether across a range of endeavours or in a limited field, or those whose potential for excellence has not yet been recognised by either tests or experts” (p.1).

This definition well suits my own research study, insofar as the members of the group I chose to work with had already demonstrated their ability in their many achievements. However, I feel that, since environmental conditions are so important in the realisation of giftedness, some mention of this should be included, so that the working definition proposed for this research is:

“Gifted or very able students are those who demonstrate outstanding achievement across a range of activities or in a specific field, or those who have the potential for this and who need optimal environmental conditions for realisation of these abilities”.

### **Final Comments**

It has been shown that over time the definitions and models of giftedness and talent have moved away from being simple and unitary to become increasingly complex. From the middle of the twentieth century the emphasis on special abilities and creativity grew and gradually various personality traits took their place in definitions and models, with external factors such as the impact of the environment in all its forms on the development of ability also being added. Recent models, theories and definitions, therefore, tend to be broadly based.

However, despite all these marked attempts to move away from the use of the IQ score as a means of identifying giftedness it is still quite extensively used for this purpose and so by implication as a means of defining giftedness. Urban (1990), for example, believes that it has an important place in gifted education. In his view, IQ tests remain the best predictors of intellectual and academic achievement.

In the light of all the work and efforts to encourage a move away from this in defining the gifted and talented, the persistence in the use of the IQ score is disappointing. This issue is especially relevant in the context of identifying the gifted and talented and will be discussed further in that section.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN**

It will be evident in the chapter on the needs of the gifted that many of these needs are determined and underpinned by their particular characteristics. A number of authors emphasise that in any study of gifted children it should be borne in mind that there is no such thing as a 'typical' gifted child. For example, Robinson et al. (1979) make this point, adding the comment "rather there are many individual children who demonstrate a variety of surprising skills in both intellectual and non-intellectual domains" (p. 145). Similar comments have been made by Passow (1985) and George (1992).

While acknowledging that each gifted child is a unique individual, at the same time the research evidence points to the existence of traits and behaviour patterns which, as noted by Clark (1988), appear to be common characteristics of gifted children as a group, occurring too frequently to be dismissed as mere coincidence. The work of six researchers has been studied in depth, all of whom were interested, either primarily or as a part of their work, to discover the characteristics of gifted children. As a very simple means of showing their findings and to facilitate ready comparisons, two tables have been compiled, based on the material studied. This exercise, so far as can be ascertained, has not been attempted previously. Although a few items may have been missed in my search, I feel this does not negate the overall picture produced.

The following sections of this chapter include a brief consideration of the common myths and fallacies about the gifted as a group and gifted children in particular. This is followed by a description of the researchers' projects. There is then a discussion of the principal intellectual and non-intellectual characteristics of the gifted as identified by the researchers, followed by final comments.

## **Myths and Fallacies**

The principal and long held misconceptions about the gifted, as described by Hallahan and Kauffman (1988), are that they are “physically weak, socially inept, narrow in interests and prone to emotional instability and early decline” (p. 413).

Terman (1925) freely admitted that, before he started his research work on the gifted, he had initially held similar views but he believed that his research findings completely refuted these theories. Much of the research which followed confirmed Terman’s (1925) conclusions, including some of the most recent findings of researchers. For example, Norman et al (2000), researching with gifted adolescents in America, came to the conclusion that their findings generally reinforced “those studies that have found gifted students as a whole to be no more or less adjusted than other students” (p.38).

## **The Characteristic Traits of the Gifted.**

The researchers, whose work is outlined below in chronological order, do not discuss exactly the same traits, but all those discussed are shown on Tables I and II, included at the end of the chapter. It is, however, important to bear in mind when making comparisons of findings that their work, while showing some consistencies, varied greatly in methodological approach, including the kinds of tests used, size and composition of the groups, the ages of the children and the use or not of control groups. The one very general common factor is that in each case they included a varying proportion of what were regarded as the most intellectually able children generally, within a cohort identified by the researcher concerned. The characteristics described are not those drawn from children with very specific ability in a special

area. In addition, since physical characteristics are not relevant to this research, these characteristics of the gifted are not discussed.

### **Intellectual characteristics**

In the early years of the last century, Terman (1925) carried out the first scientifically approached and structured research on gifted children. He conducted in-depth, long-term studies with considerable numbers of children he identified as being gifted, one of his objectives being to find out what their characteristic traits were. His pioneer work is considered to be of great significance in the literature on the gifted and there are few texts which do not make some reference to it. Montgomery (1996a) describes his work as “one of the most significant research studies of the twentieth century on high ability” (p.5). While some of his conclusions have been criticised as noted in Chapter I, and to an extent refuted, for example by Ceci (1996), his findings on the characteristics of the gifted have not been similarly attacked.

Terman’s (1925) major research project began in 1921. He made a study of school pupils in cities in California. His main experimental group consisted of 684 pupils aged between seven and seventeen years of age, who, with very few exceptions, had IQs of 140+, measured on the Terman - Binet Scale, and who represented approximately the top 1% of the population by ability. He collected information from parents and teachers and throughout his research he used various control groups and it is from his first project rather than the follow-up studies that his main conclusions as to characteristics were drawn.

In 1915 Burt (1975) started his research. His sample was drawn from the entire school population of a London Borough. From this cohort he selected the ablest 3% from each age group and indicated that in his judgement this group would have had a minimum IQ level of 128, but does not say on which test he based this score. He makes no mention of control groups but in his discussion compares his

gifted subjects with 'others' or the 'average'. He used the case-study method and followed their careers through the rest of the children's schooling.

Parkyn (1948) started his research in New Zealand in 1941. He selected his group of fifty pupils from Dunedin secondary schools on a basis of a minimum IQ score of 128 on the Revised Stanford - Binet Scale. On the basis of that particular test this level of IQ had been shown to demarcate the top 5% of the ability range. He made detailed, individual studies of these pupils from 1941 to 1947, using control groups.

Shields (1968) describes original research with fifty children selected from two cities in England. They were aged between eight and twelve years, all of them having IQs of 140 or more, measured on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). The study was specifically intended to "obtain current information about the intellectual abilities, language, and personality traits of the gifted child" (p.21). Shields makes no mention of control groups.

The object of Hitchfield's (1973) research was to study a "nationally representative group of gifted children and compare their development with that of their peers" (p.1) over a period of time. The gifted children were selected from a national survey of all children born between 3 - 9 March 1958 in England, Wales and Scotland. Comprehensive information was collected on them when they were seven and eleven years of age.

At age seven years they were selected on a basis of three criteria, these being school attainment in reading and arithmetic, a non-verbal intelligence test and parental recommendations. In all, these methods produced a group totalling 238 children for in-depth study. Further information was collected about the children at the age of eleven years, when they were given the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. The children were given other tests including divergent thinking tests and some subject specific tests. Teacher assessments were used together with their answers to a questionnaire and a Social Adjustment Guide was also used. In all, 48% of the

total group, that is 113 children, turned out to have measured IQs of 130 or more. Hitchfield (1973) in some of her comments makes special note of this group of the gifted subjects and it is these comments which are used in this study.

Freeman's (1979) research target group consisted of seventy children aged between five and sixteen years, selected from records and correspondence of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). For each child two controls were chosen, both matching the target child in age, gender and school-class; one matching the target child in measured ability and the other randomly selected.

All 210 children were given tests to ascertain their mental ability, non-verbal or culture-free tests being used as well as the Stanford-Binet IQ test. Tests and questionnaires were used to collect other kinds of information about the children, from them, their parents and their teachers. The results of all this were studied for the three groups and the children were then placed in two groups on the basis of their IQ measures, and the findings looked at again. The High IQ group contained 82 children who had scores ranging from 141 to 170, with an average IQ of 155, and Freeman (1979) felt they "provided an unusually good sample of children who would be included, by any definition, among the gifted" (p.174). The Moderate IQ group had 128 children with scores ranging from 97 to 140. Freeman discusses her findings which indicate particular characteristics which were especially noted in the High IQ Group and it is these which are recorded on the tables here.

### **The non-intellectual characteristics**

As well as using tests to measure intellectual traits, Terman (1925) devised a series of tests to measure non-intellectual traits of character and personality. He groups these traits under separate headings, namely volitional, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and social traits, and they are expressed in the form of a graduated scale, which will be explained later.

Burt's (1975) approach to making a study of the personality traits of his gifted group was very different from Terman's (1925) and he concentrates his account of his own researches on his findings associated with emotional and social characteristics. Freeman (1979) also used her own chosen system for collecting this information. However, Parkyn (1948), Shields (1968) and Hitchfield (1973) all used Terman's (1925) trait-rating scale, Hitchfield (1973) with some modifications.

### **Characteristics of the gifted as listed by other writers / researchers**

To include more recent listings of characteristics of the gifted I have used information from one other source. This is the checklist of characteristics of the gifted produced by Silverman and Maxwell (cited in Porter, 1999) for use as a means of identification of gifted children. Porter, although not describing any associated research, indicates that the validity and reliability of this checklist has been established. The characteristics listed have been added to Tables I and II at the end of the chapter, showing the findings of the other researchers, to assess the extent to which more recent views correspond with the earlier findings. The comments in the analysis take these into account.

It should be noted, however, that some of the items on this list do not match exactly in words those on the chart compiled. Because of the space limitations on the chart, I have tried to extract the essence of those characteristics involved and include them in the relevant place. I do not feel that I have misrepresented any of them but a copy of the original checklist is included at the end of the chapter for verification (Table III).

### **Analysis and Validity of Findings**

As will be seen from a study of Tables I and II, despite the considerable time-lapse between the various studies, and the other differences in the researchers'

approaches as outlined earlier, there is a considerable degree of agreement in the findings and conclusions of a number of the researchers on the distinguishing characteristics of the gifted children they studied. Parkyn (1948) and Shields (1968) comment on the similarity between their findings as a whole and those of Terman (1925). There is also an interesting correspondence between the main researchers findings and those characteristics shown in the added list.

Table I on the intellectual characteristics of gifted children shows that the greatest consensus of researchers' opinions lies in their curiosity / desire to know, which could be regarded as their thirst for knowledge, followed by many characteristics related to their verbal ability, including early speech development mentioned by some researchers. This is all reflected in their interest in reading with avid reading and an early ability to read being strongly represented in the list. A wide vocabulary is also well represented, and maybe this is not so surprising given their interest in reading. There is, in addition, a high consensus on their remarkable memories, their independence, perhaps reflected in their reading habits, their quick understanding and not surprisingly, given all these characteristics, more than half of the researchers found them to have a remarkable general knowledge. Several also note their great powers of concentration.

Their maturity of intellectual functioning is touched upon in various ways by different researchers, including mention of quality and maturity of their reading material and vocabulary, their interest in abstract ideas, their ability to see cause and effect relationships quickly and to see complex relationships.

In their leisure interests, aside from reading, the strongest consensus on distinguishing characteristics of the gifted is in their hobbies, which are notable for their breadth and variety and for the amounts of time the children are prepared to expend upon them.

Interpolating a consensus of opinion regarding creativity is not very straightforward, since the different researchers have assessed this characteristic under

different headings, either originality or creativity depending on the era during which the research was being carried out. However, it has been suggested that originality and creativity are close correlates, as noted by Jones (1972), and they are included together on Table I. Silverman and Maxwell's (cited in Porter, 1999) 'imagination' would also seem to fit here, since at least by implication definitions of creativity include this and Parnes (cited in Clark, 1988) includes imagination in his definition of creativity.

Table II shows the findings on the remaining non-intellectual traits in some detail and is based mainly on the trait-rating scale structured by Terman (1925), with additions of traits recognised by other researchers. Terman (1925), Parkyn (1948) and Shields (1968) who used this scale, give their findings in great detail and rank these by order of degree of superiority of the gifted over the average or control children. What is important, however, is that even if the difference between the gifted and control children is not great in some traits, the gifted were nevertheless still found to be, at the very least, slightly 'superior' in these traits. For the researchers who did not use this scheme, the information on these traits has been added to the chart where available. Originally I included the rating figures for those who had used them, but with a mixture of these figures and ticks the picture produced was very confused, and so I have reverted to a simple tick list.

The best correspondence in the findings recorded is on the traits of will-power / perseverance, important correlates of motivation, and found by Terman (1925), Parkyn (1948) and Shields (1968) to be amongst the more marked distinguishing characteristics of the gifted. It is worth noting that in her studies of 300 geniuses, Cox (1926) found that amongst their strong early traits were an unusual degree of persistence, perseverance and tenacity of purpose. Howe (1995) makes similar comments about such people. There is also a good consensus of findings on sense of humour, empathy / sympathy, leadership skills and fondness for large groups. These traits are spread across four of the five groups without any one dominating the picture.



There is also a good consensus of findings on desire to excel, sensitivity / empathy, self-confidence / self-esteem and musical appreciation.

The validity of the findings and of the all-over picture they present is, therefore, quite complicated to assess, given all the inconsistencies of and variations in method and approach as described. Nevertheless, there is, as noted, still a remarkable similarity in the findings of the researchers and especially in the intellectual characteristics of the gifted, shown very clearly in Table I. The non-intellectual characteristics also show quite a marked degree of consistency. Where there is such consistency this in itself lends some validity to the findings.

### **Final Comments.**

The studies tend to give an all over picture of the typical gifted child which is a very favourable one, showing him or her to have greater strengths in most aspects of life, intellectual and non-intellectual, than their average ability peers or controls. It would be naive however to assume that every gifted child will fit exactly into this mould and exhibit all of these characteristics. It was pointed out in an earlier section of this chapter that it needs to be borne in mind that every child is a unique individual. Terman and Oden (1959) in summing up the findings of Terman's research point out:

“the reader should bear in mind that there is a wide range of variability within our gifted group on every trait we have investigated .....gifted children, far from falling into a single pattern, represent an almost infinite variety of patterns” (p.16).

On the other hand, if a child exhibits quite a large number of the agreed principal characteristic traits, it could reasonably be concluded that the child may be gifted. As well as those included here, checklists showing the characteristics of gifted children have been produced by many others to help in identifying generally gifted children and they show a close similarity to the lists here. There are also now checklists for those gifted in specific abilities. These are not for use on their own but

as *additional* diagnostic tools. There will be further discussion of these checklists later.

One closing thought. Most of the groups of gifted children which the researchers studied had a middle-class bias in the cohort selected, even that of Hitchfield (1973) who tried hard to select a socially balanced group. It would make a very interesting research project to study a specially selected group, made up exclusively of gifted children from the manual social classes, and find out to what extent their characteristic traits match those of the groups studied by the researchers whose work has been discussed here.

**Table I - The Intellectual Characteristics of Gifted Children  
as Identified by Different Researchers**

	TERMAN	BURT	PARKIN	SHEILDS	HITCHFIELD	FREEMAN	SILVERMAN & MAXWELL
Early speech development	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Wide vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Mature vocabulary	✓			✓			
Conversational facility / can discuss what they do					✓		
Question authority							✓
Variety of advice for teachers						✓	
Quick understanding / speed of thought	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Lively mind, world too slow						✓	
Can concentrate on two conversations at once						✓	
Curiosity / desire to know / extensive questioning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Remarkable memory / recall	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Poor handwriting						✓	
Read early, often self-taught	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Avid / wide readers / interest in / lots of time given	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Quality / maturity of reading material	✓		✓				
Remarkable general knowledge	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Preference for abstract subjects over practical	✓						
Preference for academic subjects					✓		
Good mathematical / numerical ability	✓	○	✓				✓
Resourceful / independent	✓	✗	✗	✗		✓	
High degree of common sense	✓	✓	✓				
Mature judgement / opinions					✓		✓
Quick to see cause and effect relationships		✓		✓			
Ability to see complex relationships			✓				
Great powers of concentration		✓				✓	✓
Very observant		✓		✓			✓
Good at logical thinking				✓			
Good thinker generally							✓
Interest in abstract ideas/ infinity / destiny of self		✓		✓	✓		
Creative / strong in originality	*✓	✓	*✓	○✓	✓		✓
Excellent school progress / success in work / exams					✓	✓	
High status job expected						✓	
Enthusiastic collectors	✓			✓	✓		
Wide variety of interests / hobbies; lots of time spent	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Many cultural/ intellectual interests						✓	
Intellectual play preferred	✓						
Good at jigsaw puzzles							✓
Interest in music / musical activities	*✓	*✓	*✓			✓	
Wide variety of creative activities						✓	
Practical					✓		
Wholesome interests	✓	✓					

Key: ✓ = definite identification of characteristic.  
 \* = information from trait rating list Table II  
 ✗ = information inferred from comments on leisure-time interests etc.  
 ○ = no difference between gifted and average or control groups



**Table II The Non - Intellectual Characteristics of Gifted Children  
as Identified by Different Researchers**

	TERMAN	BURT	PARKIN	SHEILDS	HITCHFIELD	FREEMAN	SILVERMAN & MAXWELL
<b>Volitional Traits</b>							
Will power / perseverance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Desire to excel	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Self-confidence / self-assertive / self-esteem	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Prudence and forethought	✓		✓	✓			
Perfectionist							✓
<b>Emotional Traits</b>							
Sense of humour	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Cheerfulness & optimism / positive attitude	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Permanence of moods	✓		✓	✓			
Extravert		✓			✓		
Introvert		✓					
Intense							✓
<b>Aesthetic Traits</b>							
Musical Appreciation	✓		✓	✓		*	
Appreciation of beauty	✓		✓	✓			
<b>Moral Traits</b>							
Morally sensitive							✓
Conscientiousness	✓		✓	✓			
Truthfulness	✓		✓	✓			
Sympathy / empathy and tenderness	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Generosity and unselfishness	✓		✓	✓			
Strong sense of justice							✓
<b>Social Traits</b>							
Leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Sensitivity (including to approval)	✓		✓	✓			✓
Popularity	✓		✓	✓			
Freedom from vanity	✓		✓	✓			
Fondness for large groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Preference for older friends	✓					✓	✓
Fewer friends						✓	
Feel different						✓	

Key:      ✓ = definite identification  
              \* = information taken from TABLE I  
              ^ = noted in connection with reading

**Table III**

**Characteristics of Giftedness Scale by Linda Kreger Silverman and Elizabeth Maxwell**

1. Reasons well (good thinker)
2. Learns rapidly
3. Has an extensive vocabulary
4. Has an excellent memory
5. Has a long attention span (If interested, does the child stay with tasks for a period?)
6. Sensitive (feelings hurt easily)
7. Shows compassion
8. Perfectionist
9. Intense
10. Morally sensitive
11. Has strong curiosity
12. Perseverant in interests (If interested does the child persevere at tasks?)
13. Has a high degree of energy
14. Prefers older companions or adults
15. Has a wide range of interests
16. Has a great sense of humour
17. Early or avid reader (If child too young to read, is he or she intensely interested in books?)
18. Is concerned with justice, fairness
19. Judgement mature for age *at times*
20. Is a keen observer
21. Has a vivid imagination
22. Is highly creative
23. Tends to question authority
24. Has a facility with numbers
25. Good at jigsaw puzzles

## **CHAPTER III**

### **THE IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN**

To meet the needs of gifted children in terms of provision of an appropriate curriculum for them, schools and teachers should have agreed strategies for identifying these children. Most especially such strategies are required for those who are underachieving. The urgent need to identify and help all gifted underachievers is highlighted by Butler-Por (1993), for reasons such as the loss to individuals and to society of their unrealised potential.

Giftedness should be identified as early as possible (Marjoram,1988), to allow maximum opportunity for realisation of potential. It should not be a 'one-off', but a continuous process, so that those missed at one stage or late developers have every chance of being identified later (Renzulli et al., 1981; Denton and Postlethwaite, 1985; Feldhusen and Jarwen, 1993). In addition, a variety of strategies should also be used to confirm the ability, and to ensure no kind of specific ability is overlooked (Clarke 1983).

#### **Strategies for Identification**

In the literature very many of these strategies are described so I have selected for discussion those which seem to be the most universally used and recommended. They will be considered in the following groups:

Results of tests and examinations

Nomination by teachers

Provision and self-identification

## **Tests and examinations**

While there is now a wealth of test information of all kinds which is available for use, nevertheless, Shore et al., (1991), from their review of one hundred books on gifted education, make the following comment: “IQ is the most universally advocated and used criterion for the identification of giftedness”. (p53). The narrow area of ability measured by IQ tests has been discussed in Chapter I, noting that, for example, they do not measure high ability in many specific areas. Another main concern about them is that they are not culturally fair and disadvantage minority groups. Butler-Por (1993) and Wallace (2000a) express strong reservations about psychometric tests and their liability to cultural bias and Shore et al., (1991) comment on this saying that there is an “overwhelming dependence on test criteria that call upon middle-class reading skills in the majority language” (pp. 67-68).

However, even those who have reservations about the value of IQ measures agree that “such tests have their uses” (Howe, 1990, p. 98), some feeling that they can, as noted earlier, predict success in school-type achievement (Gardner,1983; Freeman,1998). Nevertheless, Howe (1995) warns against depending on this as the sole means of assessing ability to succeed, saying: “if you want to know what children are likely to succeed, don’t put all your eggs into the IQ test basket” (p.35).

There are now many other kinds of tests available to schools which help to indicate levels of ability and / or achievement. There are baseline tests used for very young pupils; cognitive ability tests of various kinds which measure verbal, non-verbal and quantitative abilities, and National Curriculum (NC) Tests, taken at different stages but in core subjects only. All of these have their disadvantages, not least that some children do not perform well in examination conditions. Able pupils can, for a variety of reasons, perform badly in tests, including by looking for complex answers where these are not necessary (Eyre 1997a).

## **Nomination by teachers**

Teachers are ideally placed to judge children's ability, and nomination by teachers is seen as important and significant (Eyre,1997a), with Painter (1989) saying that "the opinion of very experienced and skilled teachers is generally accepted as the most reliable way of identifying a gifted child" (p. 39). However, opinions on this are not all in accord. Tempest (1974), Pringle (1970) and Bennett et al., (cited in Freeman, 1998) did not find teacher judgements to be very accurate in their particular research projects. On the other hand, Denton and Postlethwaite's (1985) findings showed that where teachers were given training in this, including specific indicators to use in their observations, they increased markedly in accuracy. There are implications here for adequate training programmes for teachers.

The suggested means of helping teachers in identifying the gifted is checklists, supported by writers such as Porter (1999), Montgomery (1996a), and Wallace (2000a). Reference has been made to these in Chapter II. General checklists are based on the perceived typical characteristics of gifted children, and where a child exhibits a reasonable number of these traits this can be used to prompt further investigation. The problem with these checklists is that some of them are very long, for example the Wallace (2000a) list has thirty-one items. This makes them very time consuming for a teacher to complete. Furthermore they are of little value in identifying high specific ability (Denton and Postlethwaite,1985). However, subject specific checklists have also been produced since then, including some by Denton and Postlethwaite which they validated. They found that in general the use of checklists improved levels of teachers' identification. Freeman (1981) points out that not all checklists are so validated. She comments that:

"the best that can be said about checklists is that they may stimulate teachers to think about the identification of the very able: the worst is that potentially high achieving children who do not fit with the opinions of those who devise the lists will be missed" (Freeman, 1998, p. 12).



## **Provision and self-identification**

Identification by provision is another recommended approach, especially in the more recent literature, for example Freeman (1998) and Wallace (2000a) who says of this strategy:

“the most important aspect of identification has its roots in the quality of the provision provided by the school . . . if a school is presenting appropriate challenges and monitoring pupils’ responses, then many very able children will identify themselves” (p.28).

One type of identification by provision is allowing children who wish to do so to join special enrichment programmes for the gifted or to work on materials provided in different subject areas designed for this group. If they cope with such programmes they will have identified themselves as gifted and such processes allow for specific areas of ability to be identified. Cropley (1995), in discussing such an approach, suggests that children identified by this method succeed about as often as those identified by methods such as the IQ test.

This could be regarded as identification by opportunity and is not confined to opportunities within the classroom, since this can also be provided by a whole range of extra-curricular activities. Freeman (1998) notes that in contrast to the kind of provision made for sports and games, with out-of-hours availability of tuition and school facilities, other kinds of extra tuition and school facilities such as laboratories are not normally available at weekends. She suggests that, if such facilities were available to *all* and not just those selected by tests, students could opt to take part in extra tuition, for example in the sciences or languages, and in this way the talented would be selecting themselves. She calls this ‘Freeman’s Sports Approach’ (p.18).

There are other ways in addition to those described above in which students identify their own abilities and potential. As noted in the DES document (1977) on gifted children, extra-curricular activities and interests can provide important clues as to giftedness, and Trost (1993) from his research feels that interests “can make a

useful contribution to the prediction of outstanding achievement” (p.332). Milgram and Hong (cited in Freeman, 1998) from their research concluded that the leisure activities of adolescents were strong predictors of success in future careers.

### **Final Comments**

In conclusion there has been a gradual move away from the early use of strategies which identified gifted children only on the basis of an IQ measure and on other test measures, to a position where this rather static labelling of them as gifted is being replaced by “ a more developmental approach which recognises the learning context” (Freeman, 1998, p.15). This seems a much more effective way of recognising giftedness, especially for those not good at taking tests, or whose giftedness is not easily detected by such processes. These strategies have also broadened in taking into account abilities not necessarily exhibited in the classroom. The problems associated with such approaches are that the out-of-school extra opportunities are expensive to run, a factor always of concern in educational initiatives, and that teachers will need special training programmes to cope with recognising giftedness.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

There are those in the world of education who, even in these enlightened times, challenge the idea that gifted children have particular educational needs. Just as there are myths and fallacies surrounding the characteristic traits and personalities of these children, there are, amongst some, firmly held beliefs that the gifted can survive perfectly well without any special help or consideration.

Ogilvie (1973) noted the existence at that time of such views, observing that hand-in-hand with this idea went a belief that, come what may, true giftedness would manifest itself whatever the environmental conditions. Writing some sixteen years later, McLeod and Cropley's (1989) comments would suggest that such a viewpoint still existed and that some people would argue that "special support for the gifted involves providing help where none is needed, which at the very least is unfair" (p.5). More recently Tate (1998), speaking at an international conference on gifted education, commented:

"Everyone at this conference knows that it simply isn't true that 'bright children will always find their right level', but it is a pervasive myth. Many able children fail to 'find their right level' and, as well as creating frustrations for themselves, fail as a result to make the contribution to the wider society of which they are capable. . . . this is a contribution we can ill afford to do without". (p.24).

The importance of making some special provision to meet the needs of the gifted is now recognised at government level, evidenced in the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee document on Highly Able Children (1999) where it states that "it is simply unacceptable to argue that the most able need relatively little or no assistance. Like all children, they need the right blend of challenge and support to fulfil their potential" (p.xi).

Whatever one's view may be as to whether or not gifted children have their particular educational needs, few would argue with the view that they do have a right to equal opportunities with all other children to develop their abilities to their full potential. From 1944 onwards most educational legislation has, at the very least by implication, advocated equal opportunities for all. De Haan and Havinghurst (1957) believe that equal opportunity means that "all people should have opportunity to make the most of whatever abilities they have" (p.18), rather than all should have identical opportunity.

As noted in the Introduction, in a recent NACE / DfEE (1995) publication the comment is made that Ofsted consider the needs of able pupils as part of equal opportunity and therefore inspectors "will look for evidence of appropriate provision" (p.18). This indicates an expectation that schools should recognise and try to meet the educational needs of what are referred to here as gifted children. Subsequent government initiatives and documents, such as those discussed in the introduction, have given strong support to this idea.

In the following pages there will be some opening comments upon the particular needs of gifted children, as distinct from the needs of all or any other group of children. These will be followed by a discussion of their special educational needs under two main headings, firstly their social / emotional needs and then their curricular / academic needs, following broadly the general format used by Mason and Essen (1987). There is also reference to the way in which the individual needs discussed can be met or satisfied. The chapter ends with a summary and some criticisms followed by final comments.

Since the emphasis is upon educational needs, much of the discussion will concentrate on the needs of gifted children within the school setting, although the wider educational environment will also be considered, and especially the important role of the home background in meeting these children's educational needs.

## **The Particular Needs of Gifted Children**

It is not a completely straightforward task to separate the needs of gifted children from those of children in general. Tilsley (1981) sums up the difference in their needs quite neatly when he suggests that whilst gifted children have many characteristics and educational needs similar to other children, “it may be argued that they also have particular educational needs stemming from their giftedness” (p.10). In the same vein Eyre (1997b) comments that these children’s needs “are very similar to the needs of other children. They do have their particular needs which arise out of their ability to do things more quickly and in a more sophisticated way than other pupils” (p.65).

The main aim of this discussion is to look at those particular needs of gifted children which have been recognised and which an examination of their defining characteristics would suggest are particular to them as a group. Some of their needs as described below are unarguably exclusive to this group but others could quite rightly be said to be the needs of all children. This is acknowledged readily but, bearing in mind the comments above regarding attitudes to helping the gifted, it is felt that it is necessary to underline the fact that gifted children have these needs, just as other children, and sometimes to an even greater intensity.

## **The Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Children**

These are arguably as great as the curricular or academic needs of the gifted child, for if the child is not happy, supported, well adjusted and efficient in social skills, the motivation to work to realise potential may disappear or never develop in the first place. Freeman (1995a) endorses this point saying that “For exceptionally high-level achievement, such matters as emotional stability and self-confidence can be as important as the mastery of skills and knowledge” (Preface).

These needs are discussed under two sub-headings. First all needs relating to being socially integrated and feeling a part of society will be considered and then issues related to support of the gifted.

### **Social integration**

Probably the greatest of the social needs of the gifted is to have an awareness, understanding and acceptance of their giftedness with its implications and consequences and to be able to cope with these. Van Tassel-Baska (1993), in a review of curriculum development for the gifted, argues for inclusion of affective development in any provision programme, saying that these students:

“need to understand their own exceptionality, their intensity and sensitivity of feelings, their need for coping strategies, to help them deal with their own perfectionism and vulnerability” (p.382).

Following research carried out with 85 gifted teenagers on a summer enrichment programme, Kunkel et al. (1992) found that confusion about their giftedness was a recurring theme, with concerns expressed about the social consequences of their giftedness.

### ***Negative attitudes***

Socially, giftedness is not always acceptable, especially in the case of a generally very clever child, whose giftedness is apparently much less acceptable than that shown in specific areas such as music or athletics. Freeman (1979 and 1991), whose research work on gifted children has been described in some detail in Chapter II, on this subject observes “the more physical the activity, the more likely it is to be approved of” (1991, p.4). Painter (1996), who also carried out research with gifted children, makes a similar comment, saying that those who are exceptionally good at music, sports or the arts are held in higher regard than those who are high academic achievers. Eyre, (1997a) took part in a research project in ten Oxfordshire schools in

which Year 6 high ability pupils were observed in their classrooms. She also comments that while sporting success is acceptable in school, “it is not considered ‘cool’ to be bright” (p.99). Even worse is to be seen to be trying hard, a point also noted by Subotnik (1998). From her studies of the work of others she concluded that “being smart is OK, as long as you do not have to work at it” (p.10).

Negative attitudes are arguably the greatest social difficulty that the gifted have to cope with as a consequence of their high ability. Kerry (1992) and Painter (1996) refer to the kinds of names these children are called such as ‘professor’ and ‘swot’, with Kerry seeing their ability as a trigger for bullying and general hostile attention from peers. Lloyd (1994), a clinical psychologist, remarks that parents note the hostilities their children encounter from jealous peers and she sees the importance of social problem solving skills in coping with this. Freeman (1985), referring to other research findings, says that even in a selective school there is sometimes “an atmosphere of anti-intellectualism, where ‘swots’ are assigned a distanced social position” (p.257).

Negative attitudes are not confined to the peer group. Kerry (1983, 1992) refers to prejudice and discrimination at all levels of the school community and beyond, even throughout life. Their teachers, who find them difficult to cope with, may resent clever children. Eyre (1997b) notes that often “a teacher seems keen, almost jubilant, to point out flaws in an able child” (p.62). Kerry (1983) and Clark (1995) suggest that such attitudes stem from feeling threatened by the ability of the gifted child and Wallace (2000a) also refers to teachers of the gifted feeling threatened. Freeman (1979) comments on hostility from adults in general saying that they “seem to gain some sort of self-esteem, which is especially valuable to them in correcting or intellectually humiliating a gifted child” (p.251).

These negative attitudes are not easy for the gifted to handle and they may respond in a number of ways. One of the most serious consequences is that they may deliberately hide or play down their ability and underachieve as an avoiding tactic and

in an effort to gain peer acceptance. Butler-Por (1993), in a much quoted paper on gifted underachievers, concluded that anti-intellectual attitudes and “anti-gifted attitudes” (p.661) were environments conducive to underachievement. In Painter’s (1977) research on a group of gifted primary school children, many of the Headteachers who participated referred to the deliberate underachievement of the gifted to gain social acceptance by their peers. In the same vein Gross (1993) refers to the dilemma of the gifted in choosing either social acceptance by peers at the expense of fulfilment of abilities, or aiming for high achievement at the expense of peer acceptance.

Another consequence of negative responses and related social rejection by others is that the gifted can come to undervalue themselves and suffer loss of self-esteem. Leyden (1985), who carried out case-studies with ‘exceptionally able’ children, comments that with repeated rejection and devaluing of a child’s high ability “he may learn to lose confidence in that very ability himself, and learn to devalue himself as a learner” (p.41). Butler-Por says that the low self-concept which results from negative responses to the gifted “may mask actual capabilities and eventually leads to underachievement” (p.658). Gomme (1997) believes that the child’s self-esteem is “central to his, or her, emotional ability and therefore the ability to relate positively in the social context” (p.4), and this, as discussed, is very important to the child.

Not only is peer group acceptance and avoidance of negative reactions a cause for hiding their ability, the gifted, like most other children, do not want to be seen as ‘odd’ or ‘different’ from others. Many writers on this subject make reference to this and the resulting underachievement which is often inevitable. Tempest (1974) comments that even the young child does not like to be thought odd and that “the clever child soon learns to conceal abilities which make him laughed at or even disliked by other members of his class” (p.6). On the same subject Marjoram (1988) makes the observation “Most children including the most able want to be like other



children and accepted by the group” (p.23) and that in order to avoid the ostracism and rejection that can result from, for example, being regarded as the teacher’s pet, bright children will deliberately underachieve.

Torrance (1965) envisages a possible and even more worrying reaction saying “gifted children need help in accepting themselves because they may even despise an outstanding “gift”, if this giftedness makes them different from their peers” (p.45). Whybra (2000), who has worked extensively with gifted children, comments that they need reassurance that “they are normal yet different and need the chance to discuss a problem with a sensitive listener” (p.39). He also comments that the gifted child often sees the gift as a curse rather than a blessing.

From an early age these gifted children can become very aware that they are indeed different. Wallace (1983a) carried out original studies of gifted children, through her work with teachers and school pupils, and in some case-studies. She found that many very able children have such feelings of being different and “can feel out of step with their family, their friends and their time”. She adds “yet it is human nature to want to belong to a group however small that group may be” (p.10).

Freeman (1979) found her High IQ study group were certainly very aware that they were different from those of lesser ability, but she also noted that these particular children did not seem to be especially bothered by this. Nevertheless, responses in general from the children she studied indicated that they certainly did not want to be considered to be different. The pleasure of being placed in situations with other gifted children and therefore not feeling different is referred to by Gross (1993) who observed this in those of her research group who had been accelerated and who “were no longer rejected for being different” (p.243). Whybra (2000) quotes comments from students who attended a special enrichment and extension course for the gifted, including one who said that as well as the extra challenge, also important was “the fact that during the course it is not exceptional to be intelligent – it is the norm” (p.39).

While some researchers such as Kunkel et al. (cited in Porter 1999) see the gifted as suffering from isolation and loneliness, on the less negative side there are those who believe that, in general, gifted children cope well with negative aspects of their giftedness. Stedtnitz (1995), commenting on the findings of others, said the conclusion was that ‘moderately gifted’ primary children “were usually socially well integrated, well accepted and popular with their peers” (p.45). This all has implications for their interpersonal skills which will be discussed in some detail later.

### *Group membership, friendship, interpersonal skills*

One of the most quoted pieces of original research which considered the needs of gifted children was that documented by Ogilvie (1973), who conducted research into the teaching of primary age gifted children. The data for compiling a list of their needs were drawn from responses to a questionnaire by a group of primary school teachers, from LEAs spread across England.

A number of these needs are non-academic in nature and very similar to those being discussed here, especially the need for gifted children to be treated like other children, and to have contact with their average peers. A related need in the list is expressed as the need “To avoid being set apart but to have opportunity to set self apart on occasions” (p.36). This has both social and curricular implications, for as will be shown in the next section, these children need sometimes to work alone / independently. The social side is the need not to be set apart or not to be isolated. This reinforces the comments of other writers mentioned above regarding desire of gifted children to be a member of the group, and these needs must be recognised and met as a part of gifted children’s social integration and in helping them to feel a part of society in general. Ogilvie does not include this latter point as a specific need, although some of the teachers recognised it, listing it as a need for “social training - integration into society” (p.34).

The need to be a member of the group is referred to by many other writers and researchers. Maslow (1954) regards a feeling of belonging and having a place in a group a need for all people and, given the difficulties of the gifted, arguably these needs are intensified in this group. Whybra (1992) also notes their need to be a part of the group and Leyden (1985) emphasises this point saying of the gifted that if their peers (the group) do not accept them “life in school becomes a punishing experience” (p.38). Gomme (2000) believes that the need to belong and to communicate is as great a need in the gifted as their need to develop their abilities. Wallace (1983b) lists their need to belong to a group, to play, to share and to be accepted and Kerry (1983) their need for friendship and to be co-operative.

The need for social contacts with peers in groups of both average (mixed) and similar ability is referred to by Ogilvie (1973). It is also referred to by Tilsley (1981) who carried out research on the needs of the gifted by analysing responses to a questionnaire from 182 teachers, representing all levels of school education. He produced a list of needs, partly based on and very similar to that of Ogilvie (1973), and generally endorsed by his research. Bridges (1973) who carried out research with gifted children comments that in life they will be working with people of lesser ability than theirs and so the gifted need to work at least a part of the time in school with their (mixed ability) class mates. Subotnik (1998) discussing the research of others suggests that ability grouping offers both challenge and social support for these children. Moule (1997) believes that in the interests of promoting healthy social and emotional development, they should spend a part of their time with those whose interests and abilities are similar. This should be considered when structuring teaching groups, as will be discussed later.

All this has strong implications for forming friendships and generally for good interpersonal skills. Referring to the need for young children to learn the skills of tact and diplomacy at an early age, Leyden (1985) comments that “One of the problems for exceptionally intelligent children is the way in which they demonstrate

their cleverness, both in relation to their peers and in contact with their teacher” (pp.38-39). A clever child who is openly scornful of those less able than him/herself is not, as Leyden points out, likely to be popular amongst peers. Hollingworth (cited in Gross, 1993) saw the need for the exceptionally gifted in particular, to learn to “suffer fools gladly – not sneeringly, not angrily, not despairingly, not weepingly – but *gladly* if personal development is to proceed successfully in the world as it is” (p.299). This theme is picked up in a comment by Yang (cited in Congdon, 1995) who said the gifted had a responsibility to learn how to communicate with the average and mediocre. Working in mixed ability groupings, as discussed above, is a strategy which can be used to help the development of such tolerance and understanding, not to say an appreciation of what those less able have to offer to a group.

Learning good interpersonal skills is vital in the formation of friendships and as noted by Porter (1999) in her review of literature “the area that presents most concern for gifted children is their social relationships with their age mates” (p.152). She also notes findings which show that children choose friends whose skills and interests are similar to their own and so many gifted children prefer the company of older children or adults, and best friendships tend to be with other gifted children. Terman (1925), Freeman (1979) and Gross (1993) all noted from their research findings that the gifted in their studies had a preference for older friends. Mönks and Boxtel (1995) concluded from their studies of literature and their work with gifted adolescents that friends become more significant during this stage with the importance of their peer group increasing sharply. They also found that if so inclined they could enhance potential friendships by making their extra abilities available to their age mates.

In general the gifted are mostly seen as having well-developed social and interpersonal skills, usually making friendships and relating easily to others (Terman 1924., Parkyn 1948., Clark 1988., Porter 1999). These skills together constitute what some refer to as social or emotional intelligence and Marlow (cited in Romney and

Pritt, 1999, p.137.) defines this as “the ability to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of persons, including oneself, and to act appropriately upon that understanding” (page not given). Lowenstein (2000) says that those who have such emotional skills “tend to excel in life” (p.35). It would seem therefore that these skills are regarded as important for the gifted, as implied by frequent reference in gifted literature.

Stedtnitz (1995) sees leadership as part of social intelligence. This is another issue to which, especially recently, there is much reference in the literature as necessary for development in the gifted, not only for their own satisfaction but also for their important contribution to society through this. Van Tassel-Baska (1993) sees this as part of social development and an important skill to develop in the gifted, with a need for their contribution to society in this respect. Cropley and Dehn (1996) in discussing leadership take a similar view saying:

“many recent discussions emphasise the need for gifted individuals to use their gifts and talents in an ethically desirable way, applying them not, for instance, to self-aggrandisement and personal enrichment, but to the solution of societal problems such as poverty, prejudice, or environmental destruction” (p.4).

Few would argue against this as being worthy of inclusion in the list of perceived needs of the gifted. Without doubt Pringle (1970) would support its inclusion, for she believes that in educating the very able, the aim should be not just the achievement of their potential abilities but to persuade them to see these as “precious gifts which they are fortunate to possess and which carry with them obligations and responsibilities” (p.130). More recently Heller (1993) refers to individual responsibility which he sees as including a responsibility to use opportunities offered but also an individual’s responsibility to society, to make an appropriate contribution to its social well being.

Leadership training approaches and programmes for the gifted are promoted, especially in America, and the results of one of these carried out by Smith et al.,

(1991) led them to conclude that such skills can be learnt successfully. However, I feel that while these skills are important for the gifted, all children could benefit from learning such skills to the best of their ability and that this should be built into the school curriculum rather than being something only for the gifted. For example, there are many opportunities for this in extra-curricular activities.

## **Support**

### ***In-school support***

The gifted, just like all other children, vary considerably in personality and temperament and while some do have the social skills and necessary strengths to cope very efficiently and effectively with all these possible difficulties, others may need considerable support and help. For those gifted children who do need support, much could be done to help them to cope adequately with these problems by the provision within the school of a sensitive and appropriate system of counselling, through a good pastoral support network. George (1992) believes that “many gifted and talented children need support” and that “counselling is an important element in any gifted education programme” (p.86). He feels that “Ideally each school should have a counsellor who is a part of the school team” (p.86). I disagree with this view. A special counsellor for the gifted would draw attention to them, make them seem different in the eyes of their peers, which, as noted, they do not like. Furthermore I believe that the relationship of class / form teachers to their pupils is an important one which should not be undermined by gifted children having someone else to approach in the role of counsellor. It would also discourage form / class teachers from developing skills in helping their gifted pupils.

Other writers, for example McLeod and Cropley (1989), Butler-Por (1993), Stedtnitz (1995) and Whybra (2000) also make reference to the need for counselling amongst the gifted. George (1992) makes a distinction between personal and social counselling and vocational or careers guidance. This latter too is a need in gifted

children, especially those who have high all-round ability. Freeman (1995b) makes this point saying they need help “because the many talents that some possess cause difficulties for them, sometimes for many years, in choosing how best to direct their lives” (p.179). Shore et al., (1991) make a similar point, saying that decisions are made harder for the gifted by their multiple interests and the need for career education is broadly endorsed.

As well as counsellors, mentors can be important in helping to support the gifted child and the counsellor and mentor could be the same individual. Like the counsellor the mentor has a dual supporting role, being important in the social and academic context. Shore et al., (1991) report that many writers on the gifted regarded mentoring as an essential part of provision for them. In a paper on mentoring Zorman (1993) describes her view of this as “one of the most effective ways of helping the gifted to actualize their potentials” (p.727). She gives examples from history of the very important role of mentors in the lives and achievements of eminent people such as Darwin.

Freeman (1995b), quoting another writer, suggests that mentors are people who spend time with individual children “in a learning relationship and challenge them to make the most of their capacity” (p.179). She thus supports the idea that any suitably gifted or qualified adult can fulfil this role and not only the teacher in the school. George (1995) supports this broader view that mentoring can be undertaken either by a teacher in the school or by someone from outside. Cropley (1995) makes the interesting suggestion that mentors need not be gifted themselves, suggesting that “the crystallizing person is sometimes someone in a more humble, encouraging role, such as a primary school teacher” (p.108). A personal view is that even within the school there may well be adults other than the teaching staff who also could act as mentors.

The importance of the role model is referred to in some of the literature. Pringle (1970) from her own research on able underachievers and a study of the

literature came to the conclusion that one of the factors conducive to achievement is “the availability of an admired and achieving adult with whom they can identify” (p.137). Freeman (1996) describes the important part played by parents as role models commenting that they are “the first and most important role models”(p.5). Herskovits (2000) quotes from other research to the effect that it seems difficult not to succeed where there are parents who are scholarly role models.

In discussing why able girls generally do not reach their potential after they leave school, Freeman (1996) suggests one reason for this is that they lack female role models. Stedtnitz (1995) makes a similar point in discussing some of the disadvantages suffered by talented girls.

Teacher role models are also seen as important. Pringle (1970) makes reference to their special impact in this regard where family models are lacking. From their research with gifted adolescents Kunkel et al., (1992) concluded that teachers “serve an important function as role models and mentors” (p.13). Csikszentmihalyi et al., (1997) from their research, also with teenagers who were high achievers, concluded that such students for their success had needed teachers who were good role models.

From the discussion above it seems a reasonable conclusion that gifted children may find their very considerable academic achievements an embarrassment and largely because of negative attitudes of others. These children need to be able to achieve without embarrassment, to take pride in their achievements and have due recognition and praise / rewards for them. They are just as human as other children in needing rewards for work well done. Pringle (1970), in her discussion of children’s needs, says that for the will to succeed in the face of failure they need recognition of both achievement and effort and they also need incentives such as praise. Rutter et al., (cited in Freeman 1985) found from their research that praise for good work is important for the gifted who, when expectations are too high, tend to



miss out on this. Csikszentmihalyi et al., (1997) concluded from their research that the talented need rewards and recognition.

The whole ethos and atmosphere and hidden curriculum of the school and classroom can do much to help in this. Eyre (1998a) refers to the “need for a positive climate that recognises, encourages and rewards achievement” (p.38). This need is now being recognised at DfEE level with reference to it in Excellence in Schools (1997) where it stated that “All schools should seek to create an atmosphere in which to excel is not only acceptable but desirable” (p.39). More recently in the DfEE National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (2000), in the guidance on teaching able children, it is stated that “At whole school level, schools need to generate a positive ethos for able pupils” (p.4)

Implicit in the above comments is the important role of the teacher and especially the classroom teacher in supporting able students and in creating such an ethos and atmosphere where achievement is recognised and even celebrated. In most schools, for all children including the gifted, the class teacher or form tutor usually takes on the role of the counsellor and provides social support when needed as well as academic support. The crucial part played by the class teacher in the general success and well being of all pupils needs little elaboration here. Montgomery (1996a), drawing on the research of others and referring especially to gifted underachievers, comments that what was found essential in all studies was “the need for the ‘special’ teacher to provide a warm, friendly, flexible and supportive classroom climate” and she also notes findings that such factors create a “classroom climate and school ethos which benefits all pupils” (p.197). Kerry and Kerry (2000) advise that in improving the education of the able, the teacher should, amongst many other strategies, create a suitable learning ethos or a ‘cool learn’ ethos where “thinking, ideas and contribution are all valued” (p.17). In theory this sounds good but given that children’s attitudes are influenced from outside, where there is, as already noted, some antagonism

towards the gifted and to high academic achievement, it may not be so easy to prevent such attitudes being brought into the classroom.

### *Home support*

There can be little doubt as to the importance of and the need for a supportive home background in all aspects of children's lives and not least in their educational progress. It is especially important if a child is having any kind of problem in school, when support and understanding at home can be the crucial factor in the child's coping well with and overcoming the problems. The gifted child who is meeting with all the negative attitudes and difficulties described above and for whom help in school may not be appropriate or available, may be enabled to cope and survive to have a happy and successful school career largely because of support within the home environment. This point is well made by Wallace (1983a), for example, who comments: "The most vital sustaining factor is obviously the home background. Where parents seek to provide adequate stimulation and cultivate opportunities for talking, the child can develop wide interests and openly discuss any frustrations or difficulties s/he encounters" (p.14).

This support at home is also an important need in the academic context for these gifted children, especially if their needs are not being met adequately by provision in their schools. In Freeman's (1979, 1991) research home support proved to be crucial to the children in all aspects of their lives and she refers to the vital part played by the home background in the support of the gifted, their happiness and success, in many of her books and articles. Pringle's (1970) research with able misfits showed that the influence of the home and parents is of paramount importance in the success and happiness of an able child. She believes that the loved and secure child enjoys learning and can cope with stress. Many other writers and researchers comment on this issue. The powerful influence of parental support, encouragement and provision of opportunities in actualization of talent is noted by Bloom (1990).

Howe (1990, 1995), also refers to this influence and notes the impact of very dominant father figures in the lives of 'geniuses' such as Mozart, John Stuart Mill, and Norbert Wiener.

Mason and Essen's (1987) book on the needs of gifted children is the only text I have discovered which is devoted entirely to the general needs of gifted children. Their research was with the parents of children aged between 3 and 18 years who had approached the NAGC for help with their gifted children. They analysed 125 returned questionnaires and had interviews with selected parents. The importance of a supportive home background and of parents who are aware that their gifted children are in need of help in coping with all aspects of this is quite a predominant theme in this text. Some of these parents found that their child had "relatively more need to talk about feelings and behaviour, and the child could be greatly helped by doing so" (p.34).

This importance of support from home generally is well summed up by Jackson (1980), who carried out a small study of seven gifted children and, discussing other research, comments as follows:

"What is obvious from the evidence is that the immediate world into which the child is born – mother and father, family, home, material pressures or opportunities, thought, care, skill, love – can all limit or enlarge a child's talent to an astonishing degree" (p.122).

#### *Home-school liaison and time to relax*

Few would argue that home-school liaison can be vital in helping to resolve any difficulties a gifted child or any child may have. The importance attached to this by the DfEE is underlined in Excellence in Schools (1997). It is especially important where the home background is such that the child is not getting the necessary support. Where there is a good, well-established system of home-school liaison and the school is aware of the child's giftedness, the school can help the parents to understand their child's needs through tactful guidance or counselling. George (1992) suggests that

“there is often a need for family counselling, as some parents are bewildered, disbelieving, fearful, or even resentful of their child’s abilities” (p.86). Passow (1993,1995) considers this an important need in fostering giftedness. He feels neither parents nor the school can develop and nurture talent effectively without liaison between them and that both need this mutual support with sharing of information about the child.

There is, of course, the other side of this coin. Some parents are over-ambitious and over-anxious for their gifted children to be outstandingly successful. There can be little doubt as to the stress and anxiety this can cause in their children, a point underlined, for example, by Freeman (1979). McLeod and Cropley (1989) refer to the danger of “forcing” apparently clever children as a “pathway to prestige for school and parents”. They add the danger is, “on the one hand, that clever children will become the victims of adults’ striving and be labelled, isolated and forced (for the ego gratification of others)” or, on the other hand, that “those who do not measure up to expectations will learn to label themselves as failures, because they could not fulfil exaggerated expectations” (p.3). Freeman (1995a) also refers to parents of gifted children who “try to gain social advantage from living vicariously through their child” (p.12) and believes that talented children need *unconditional* love in the nurturing of their ability

As touched upon in one of the above quotes, schools can be just as guilty as parents in pushing children too hard and the victims of this pressure from all sides can end up having no lives of their own, no time to themselves. Being over-pressured to achieve is not suffered exclusively by the gifted but they would seem to be the more likely victims of this, and thus it is very important that there should be an awareness in school and especially at home that they too need time to themselves, time to relax and play, to enjoy themselves and to be children. Herskovits (2000) refers to research which showed that part of the role of the family is recognition that these children need some recreation and fun, this being part of an atmosphere which is

positive and achievement orientated. Shore et al., (1991) quote comments from the literature to the effect that parents who pressure the child should remember that the gifted child wants and should be allowed to play and act like other children.

### **The Curricular / Academic Needs of Gifted Children.**

In those texts which make reference to the specific needs of gifted children there tends to be some concentration on their curricular / academic needs and in particular an emphasis on how these can be met, most notably within the school environment. There is also a varying amount of space given by the writers to the different perceived needs of this nature, with, in some instances, only one reference to a particular need specifically as such, although in many instances the need is there by strong implication. In the following discussion the order and sequence follows as logical a pattern as possible, with the 'overlap' support needs considered first, then the needs related to challenge, followed by those involving all aspects of independence.

#### **Overlap needs**

The inevitable overlap in the two groups of needs has been noted. Those needs which are mentioned in the first section and which are also important academic / curricular needs include a home background which supports and encourages the gifted child. As Pringle (1970) observes referring to children of any ability "The wanted and loved child of intelligent and educated parents is fortunate: .... their pleasure at his progress will be the strongest incentive for him to aim at further achievements" (p.131). This will be especially necessary where such encouragement is lacking in the school environment.

Counselling in school is just as important in the academic as in the non-academic context, for, as described, social and emotional problems have a direct

effect on achievement levels and the role of mentoring in the academic context has also been discussed. Home-school liaison is very important in this respect too and none of these needs requires elaboration in addition to that already given. Such a support system in the background will do much to help attempts and efforts to meet academic and curricular needs such as the very important need of the gifted to be kept motivated.

## **Challenge**

### ***Boredom, appropriate challenge and motivation***

Challenge is arguably the most important academic / curricular need of the gifted or very able pupil, with Torrance (1965), Ogilvie (1973), Tilsley (1981) and Wallace (1983b) all listing this as a need. Freeman (1997) refers to their need for a consistent challenge and Kerry (1983) says they need to be stretched. This need is now also acknowledged in the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee Fourth Special Report (1999) on highly able children where it states that “they need the right blend of challenge and support to fulfil their potential” (p.xi). In Chapter II on characteristics of gifted children it was noted that most of the researchers observed that gifted children were quick thinking, quick to understand and had remarkable memories. That is they learn easily and tend to remember what they have learnt. Thus in a class where teaching is aimed at the average level of ability they often find the work too easy, they complete it quickly and find it lacking in challenge.

All too often the result is boredom and this is one of their greatest problems and most dangerous enemies. If they are not challenged appropriately very able children are likely to become bored and demotivated. A number of writers and researchers make reference to this problem and it is a reasonable conclusion that the greater the ability of the child the greater this problem can be. In the early part of this century Hollingworth (1942) carried out research with twelve children of very high

measured intelligence, that is IQ scores of 180+. She used mainly the case-study method and followed some of her subjects' careers for twenty years. From her findings she concluded that such children "become almost intolerably bored with school work if kept in lockstep with unselected pupils of their own age" (p.93)

Tempest (1974) carried out research with a selected group of gifted children who were placed in a special group and studied throughout their primary school careers. He refers more than once to the problem of boredom, its causes and correlates. He comments that these children are bored by tasks they find too easy and may direct their energies and abilities into becoming a nuisance.

Another correlate of lack of challenge and boredom is underachievement. This is noted by Butler-Por (1993) who, citing research findings on gifted underachievers, says that when their abilities are not utilised in the classroom "boredom and lack of motivation for learning soon sets in" (p.660) and that this was the cause of much of the underachievement of the gifted in the study concerned. Painter (1989) refers to bored gifted pupils, under the heading of underachievers, as "covert gifted children" which are "those who do not choose to let it be known .... the ease with which they are able to learn set work and carry out the other tasks they are required to do" (p.12). They are bored, she too believes, because their school work does not present a challenge. They find it particularly boring if asked to repeat many exercises of the same kind on, for example, a mathematical problem which they have already mastered, or to do exercises which do not increase in difficulty.

Similar comments on the negative effects created by a classroom diet for the gifted of 'more of the same' are made by Mason and Essen (1987), who suggest that the "frustration created by more of the same ad nauseam can be very harmful and destructive" (p.46). Carey (1995) refers to repetition as "the soul destroyer of gifted children" (p.3). Such repetition does not offer an appropriate challenge and Freeman (1998) notes research which has shown that the gifted more often than other children complain of being bored usually because of *inappropriate* challenge. Commenting

on this Eyre (1997a) lists, as well as repetition, the next page in the book, additional unrewarded work and unplanned activity as inappropriate challenge.

An HMI (1992) document gives details of a survey carried out by a series of inspections which focused on the work of very able pupils in primary and secondary maintained schools in ten LEAs. In the document's conclusion the very first observation is that in most of the schools the expectations were not high enough, although this is a complaint frequently made in Chief Inspector's reports regarding *all* children. At the root of the problem of low teacher expectations of the gifted may be failure to recognise the potential of such children or, if recognised, there is no adequate provision for them. It is likely that this is a large element in their boredom, for this again means inadequate or at best inappropriate challenge for the gifted.

High levels of motivation or what Renzulli (1986) calls task commitment and the related traits of perseverance and desire to excel are regarded as amongst the strongest characteristics of the gifted and correlates of giftedness, all this discussed in some detail in Chapter II. Ziv (cited in Shore et al., 1991) comments that "the gifted child's eagerness to learn is his most salient characteristic" (p.214). None would dispute the vital role of motivation and perseverance in achievement. The part played by this in the very highest levels of performance and achievement by famous and eminent people has been demonstrated in many studies both from original research and retrospective studies such as those of Cox (1926), Roe (1983), Radford (1990) and Howe (1990 1995). It is important therefore that this motivation is not reduced or destroyed by inappropriate challenge such as described.

### ***Thinking skills and learning styles***

As indicated in the chapter on their characteristics, the gifted are able to understand and process abstract concepts and ideas, and are generally capable of more complex cognitive processes than their average ability peers. Recognising this, there is a great deal, especially in the recent literature on the gifted, on the importance of



offering appropriate or real challenge by giving them tasks which demand or at least encourage the use of thinking skills. General or specific thinking skills are actually mentioned as a need or a need to be taught or encouraged as a part of their curriculum by Passow (cited in Martin 1981), Freeman (1995b), and Porter (1999), while Kerry (1983) refers to their need for working at higher cognitive levels. Their need for using and developing the higher order and problem solving skills is especially emphasised. On this issue Montgomery (1996a) comments:

“the identification of suitable learning and teaching environments to nurture higher-order thinking abilities in able pupils in schools and colleges has become a major preoccupation in the field of education” (p.19).

Sternberg’s (1986) triarchic theory of intellectual giftedness may have been partly influential in this since it is essentially about higher thinking processes. However, well before this Bloom (1956) proposed a model of cognitive skills. In this he listed six processes, the acquisition of knowledge, the comprehension of that knowledge and its application and the skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, the latter three involving more complex or higher level / higher order thinking skills. Often when reference is made to such skills it is Bloom’s model which is quoted or envisaged and there is much promotion of the importance of these for the gifted, with some writers such as George (1995) using this as a model on which to base enrichment modules. There is now also much emphasis on other related thinking skills as necessary in providing a challenging curriculum for the gifted. Shore et al., (1991) from their comprehensive literature review comment that “nearly every writer on gifted education has commented on the importance of fostering clear, creative, critical thinking” (p.124), and they add that there is some focus on complex, productive, abstract and / or higher order thinking skills. Special modules and programmes for teaching thinking skills to the gifted are promoted in the literature, for example, Clark (1995).

Metacognition is also much promoted in recent literature as an important cognitive skill to develop in the gifted. There are many definitions of this, one of the most straightforward being offered by Bentley (2000) who sees this as the process of “thinking about one’s own thinking” (p. 23). He says that it is argued that a development of metacognitive awareness is central to the development of thinking skills generally. Favell (cited in Montgomery 1996b) equates critical thinking with metacognition and believes that the process of thinking about how we are thinking and learning is likely to promote intellectual development. Quoting from the literature, Porter (1999) suggests that metacognitive knowledge consists of knowledge about abilities, and how, when and why to use learning strategies, so this would include an understanding of one’s learning styles. Fisher (1992) equates metacognition with Gardner’s (1999) intrapersonal intelligence and suggests that the growth of metacognition is a key factor in successful learning.

All who write about metacognition see it as an important skill for the gifted to learn, Feldhusen et al., (1989) commenting that students who develop these skills can better control their “thinking, problem solving, conceptualizing, reasoning, remembering, synthesising, analysing, and both creative and critical thinking”. (p.253). There is a growing literature on this with discussion, advice on and schemes for teaching these skills to the gifted, some included with schemes for teaching thinking skills generally, such as that of Wallace (2000a) who has used and developed her programme for this in research with underprivileged school children in South Africa. Some writers on the issue of teaching thinking skills, and especially Wallace (2000b), believe these skills, while very important for the gifted, are also important for all pupils. I fully endorse this view. However, while special programmes for this may have their value, I believe that these skills, just like leadership skills, should be taught as an integral part of the curriculum and disagree with any idea of a detached programme for this.

In *appropriate* challenge different cognitive learning styles also need to be taken into consideration, with teaching strategies designed to take account of factors such as right and left brain dominant learners, and those who learn best through the different senses (Smith 1996). There is a growing support for teaching strategies which take into account Gardner's (1999) intelligences and there are numerous other learning preferences also to be taken into account, such as working alone or with a group, using learning aids, negotiation of learning etc. Eyre (1997a) discusses such issues in some detail.

### *Specific talents and abilities and balance in the curriculum*

Appropriate challenge does not refer only to the traditional classroom subjects. Ogilvie (1973) touches on this when he lists the need for opportunity, in abundance, to exercise specific talents, which come into the category of specific abilities. The broader view of giftedness, discussed in Chapter I, which developed over the second half of the Twentieth Century, encourages taking into account specific talents / abilities, as does Gardner's (1983, 1999) theory of multiple intelligences.

This accords with the need for balance in the curriculum and Ogilvie's (1973) research showed a strong support amongst the teachers for the principle of an all-round or general education and balance. This need is emphasised in the DES (1977) report on gifted children which states that they should not pursue their special gifts at the expense of other important areas. If other areas of ability are neglected then there is not going to be the opportunity to discover either interest or ability in the neglected areas. This also runs counter to the idea of offering the gifted opportunities to discover new abilities and interests and develop these, as described in the discussion on identification. The perceived importance of balance in the curriculum for *all* is evidenced in the National Curriculum (1988) in which it is stated that all pupils are entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum.

While not disputing the need for balance, Ogilvie's (1973) stated need for the gifted to have "abundant opportunity and encouragement to exercise specific talents" (p.36) is discussed by some writers as a very important need in the development of the talent to high levels of achievement, especially in performance. Freeman (1995b) expresses this as a need "to practise their skills for the required length of time to produce expert performance" (p.179). Howe promotes this idea strongly (1990, 1995) and believes that this kind of dedication and long hours of practice are of more significance in development of talent to expert performance level than is any innate gift or ability. Some of the studies of geniuses and eminent people, referred to earlier, support the view that long hours of dedicated study / practice were fundamental to the development of the abilities concerned. It should be noted that none of these writers suggests that this was the only factor in the success of those concerned, the influence of the home background being much emphasised. It is recognised that musicians, athletes, swimmers and sportsmen and women have to spend long hours practising and training to reach their top standard of performance. This applies equally to the very intelligent who must give just as much attention to studying to achieve the same ends.

Although the discussion of this issue follows on logically from comments on development of all skills and abilities, as a part of general challenge, nevertheless, the question of time to practise and develop a special talent to a high level of competence is more about independence than challenge. It is therefore included in the list of needs in the section on independence. Equally the need for a good general education / balanced curriculum is also discussed in this connection, and as a very general issue it seems most logically placed at the start of the list of academic / curricular needs.

When the expertise for a particular area in which a child is outstandingly able cannot be given in school, adults or mentors can be brought into the school to provide the necessary support. However, what is just as important is that in order to fulfil all the listed requirements in providing for the gifted some special training is essential for

teachers. It seems very unfair to expect them to be able to cope with such specialised provision without any knowledge of the topic, even though expectations now are that they should be doing so, as evidenced in the DfEE guidelines (1999) for teaching literacy and numeracy to able pupils.

### *Coping with failure*

An interesting idea is included in Ogilvie's (1973) list of needs of the gifted. Where reference is made to their need to be challenged and stretched, the suggestion is that this should be done "even to the extent of experiencing failure and humbling experiences" (p.35). A number of writers elaborate on this point. Before Ogilvie's research, Torrance (1965) commented that gifted children should occasionally be set tasks which are too hard for them to solve so that this would "help them develop the skills for coping with such problems" (p.45).

Tilsley (1981) notes the importance of experiencing failure in the supportive environment of the school. Leyden (1985) on this theme points out that we learn as much from our failures as from our successes and that if the experience of failure "is to be a helpful one, it needs to take place within the context of a supporting relationship" (p.42). She notes that many very able children "grow up to fear failure" (p.42) and become increasingly reluctant to take (intellectual) risks, the seeds of this being sown at the primary stage. She says that we must "help children understand that only by having the courage to take risks will we ever discover our full capabilities, and that risk-taking in whatever field will inevitably involve failures as well as successes" (p.42). Cropley (1995) makes a similar point when discussing the fostering of creativity. Referring to gifted children, he says that they should have experience "both in seeking solutions and also in making errors free of negative sanctions, or even being praised for a bold but unsuccessful attempt rather than a tame correct solution" (p.111). Eyre (1997a) also suggests that to learn strategies for coping with difficulty able pupils need to struggle and occasionally fail, otherwise

they will find this a very traumatic experience later on in life. Bentley (1995) believes that part of a climate conducive to learning is one which indicates that “it’s OK to try things out .. it’s OK sometimes to get things wrong” (p.14).

Leyden’s (1985) view that willingness and encouragement to take intellectual risks is one way of helping gifted children to discover the full range of their abilities is supported by Tilsley, insofar as he sees discovering the range of their abilities as one of the special needs of gifted children. This could appropriately be added to their need to be stretched and extended, even to the point of failure. The normal classroom does not always provide the opportunities for the gifted in this respect, and it is important to underline this as one of their needs, especially in view of the fact that the full extent of their gifts and talents can be very considerable and not always necessarily evident even to themselves.

Learning to fail is something that everyone has to cope with and for the majority of people it is a common enough experience which many must learn to handle from an early age. However, for those who rarely fail and for the few who therefore might be inclined to self-satisfaction or self-adulation because of their high ability, learning to fail, as noted, can be a necessary experience. However, while a humbling experience may occasionally encourage students to reflect on the reasons for their failure, I feel strongly that this should not be made a *humiliating* experience for the child. Many of the comments made earlier suggest that these children all too often are feeling uncomfortable about their ability and do not need to be demoralised - quite the reverse. They certainly need to learn to cope with failure but this should happen in a supportive environment where such demoralisation is reduced to a minimum and they can be encouraged to see it positively as creating new challenges and extending the frontiers of their learning. With the right teacher reactions it can also help them to see that process is sometimes as important as end product. On this Eyre (1997a) comments that in a classroom “where risk-taking and hypothesising are

highly valued, regardless of the end outcome, then children are more comfortable with the idea of failing to complete the task” (p.89).

#### *Contacts with those of similar ability and interests*

Following on from the above comments, two other and related needs of gifted children are included in Ogilvie’s (1973) list, one being the need to have contact with children “of comparable levels of ability” (p.35). The other is the need for them “to have contact with teachers gifted in similar fields” (p.36), although Tilsley (1981) sees this rather as a need for the teacher to have specialist expertise. The role of mentors is also relevant here. It seems sensible to subsume these into one broader general need, for contacts with all sorts of other people, within and outside the school, can be of help to gifted children. This could, for the purposes of this study, be expressed as a need to have regular contact with others of similar ability and interests both in and out of school.

As well as the noted social benefits of contacts with other children of like ability, the intellectual challenge involved in such contacts is also seen as having benefits too. Leyden (1985) points out that all children need contact with others of similar interests and abilities, “in order that they may flex their intellectual muscles and gain a realistic understanding of their own performance”. She adds that such contacts for very able children “often provide a wonderful sense of relief” (p.43).

Tilsley (1981), referring to the findings of other writers, comments that for gifted children “working with other gifted children may be a very salutary experience, not only in terms of intellectual stimulation but also of a reduction of smugness and feelings of superiority” (p.11). Tempest (1974) makes a similar observation, saying that for the very able child “it is shattering for him to learn that there are so many as good as, perhaps even better than, he is, although the lesson may be a valuable one in humility” (p.15). Here again, however, as with the experience of failing, this too may be very demoralising unless handled very carefully.

On the question of humility Silverman (cited in Carder,1999) found, from a project in acceleration, that for many of the pupils this was their first experience of being equalled or even surpassed in their work. She added that there were several episodes to suggest that conceit was corrected by the experience of being with a large number of students of equal ability on a day-to-day basis. Whybra (1992) also sees the positive side of being with kindred spirits for some gifted children, including perhaps learning a little humility but also in helping to engender a respect for the strengths and abilities of others.

Wallace (1983a) is the only researcher discovered who actually refers to the gifted children's own views on this question of the need for contact with other equally able children. She said that most very able children expressed "a need for a group of like-minded peers who will provide not only a forum for discussion but also mutual support" (p.14). She says that the gifted "need opportunities to work and play .... with intellectual peers in order to bring them the same personal joy that musicians or footballers, for example, have in playing and working together" (p.15).

## **Independence**

### ***Working independently***

The remaining needs of the gifted are all related to independence, especially intellectual independence and by implication to study and research skills and habits, although most of them also relate to being appropriately challenged.

One of the defining characteristics of the gifted is that they are resourceful and independent. Passow (cited in Martin,1981) believes the gifted need to be independent, self-directed and have a desire to create and experiment. In saying they need to follow their own lines of research Ogilvie (1973) is indicating the same need and all those who support the idea of pursuing their own and new interests are supporting the need for them to be independent. The comments earlier on thinking skills and learning styles and their need to have these developed and taken into



account is again about challenge but also about encouraging and developing intellectual independence. Freeman (1995b) supports the idea of this as a need and, closely related to this, she comments on the dangers of rote learning (1979). The gifted, as noted, have remarkable memories, and this could be an easy means of coping with difficult concepts or, to quote Freeman (1979), it offers “an immature, spurious emotional security, in that the pupil does not have to make his or her own learning decisions, but only reproduces what an authority . . . has said” (p.69). She believes that, because of the danger of too much memorising, they “need encouragement to think independently (autonomously), maybe at a tangent to the syllabus” (Freeman 1995b, p.179). Intellectual independence is also very much a part of encouraging their creativity and intellectual risk-taking, which is discussed below.

On the issue of independent study Ogilvie (1973), as noted earlier, lists the need for the gifted to work sometimes on their own but without becoming isolated. Shore et al., (1991) from their literature search say that independent study is recommended by almost everybody and they quote comments to the effect that this is particularly suited to the needs of the gifted.

Tempest (1974) observed that quite young gifted children are “usually happy to work on their own, each at his own speed” (p.14). He adds that they become absorbed in what they are doing, if interested, and dislike being distracted. On the same subject Bridges (1973) says many children “do their best work when they are working by themselves and this applies especially to any activity requiring depth of thought or to any creative activity” (p.33). However there is a danger that too much independent work could result in the child becoming isolated. The child needs to be guarded against becoming too withdrawn, for generally, as noted in the previous section, they dislike this and want to belong to and be with the group. Furthermore Shore et al., (1991) warn that while independent study helps students with an “intense

curiosity” about a particular topic, it should not be used as “a dumping ground for a pesky, bright child” (p.170).

This reflects my slight criticism of allowing such children to work alone on a regular basis. I feel this should only be allowed where the work has been carefully planned and negotiated with the child and is regularly monitored and evaluated, also with the child, rather than being allowed to drift on for an undefined amount of time unchecked. Apart from all other aspects of such an approach it is not very motivating for the child never to have work checked or discussed.

### *Pace*

The need for the gifted to work at a fast pace is represented in Ogilvie’s (1973) list as the need to “pass rapidly through elementary stages and use advanced resources” (p.36). The expression of this as working at their *own* pace is preferred since it is broader and includes allowing those who wish to work slowly, in depth and to give the meticulous attention to detail some topics require and some gifted children prefer, rather than working at high speed. Freeman (1995b) also seems to favour the broader expression of this need, referring to it as a need for the “opportunity to work at their own rate of learning” (p.179) allowing for the slower rate of working as well as a high speed. Eyre (1997a) comments that when it comes to the question of pace it is usually the need for able children to work at a fast pace that is considered. However, she warns that moving too quickly through content and learning concepts is less effective than a more leisurely pace with time “*to reflect, experiment and incubate ideas*” (p.86).

Amongst the typical characteristics of the gifted is their ability to learn and understand and grasp concepts quickly and they also have remarkable memories. In recognition of all this much space is given in the literature to the need of the gifted child to work more quickly than the average child in a class. To a great extent this has been covered either explicitly or implicitly in the first part in this section in the

comments on challenge, boredom etc., so little extra needs to be said here. Porter (1999) also believes that a faster pace than is usual for their age is needed in the curriculum offered to the gifted and this need is also recognised in DfEE documents such as the Frameworks (2000) for teaching literacy and numeracy to able pupils. Here it is suggested that one way of making provision for this group is by a faster pace.

The need for the gifted to be allowed to work at their *own* pace, including in depth if need be, is closely linked with the need listed by Ogilvie (1973) for them to have guidance rather than direction to a greater depth of study. The characteristic interest of these children in their leisure pursuits or hobbies, and especially their tendency to become deeply involved in these interests and to study and research them in great depth, is reflected in comments of Van Tassel Baska (cited in Shore et al., 1991). She believes that gifted children actually crave depth, while Freeman (1985) says they “often have a natural desire for detail, to get to know all there is about a subject” (p.16). Therefore, while it may be necessary for some who have a strong preference for a fast pace to be encouraged to give a greater depth of treatment to some of their studies, it may not be a need for all. Perhaps this need would be more aptly described as a need to be encouraged *or allowed* to give greater depth of treatment to study material and topics.

#### *Existing and new interests*

Another characteristic of the gifted is one just noted that they very often have a range of interests and hobbies which they study in great depth. Tilsley (1981) sees the great motivation and curiosity and the capacity for working independently and researching which they show in pursuit of these, as traits which should be fostered in school. Wallace (1983b) also includes their need to be allowed or encouraged to develop their own interests in her discussion of their needs, and Freeman (1995b) extends this need and expresses it as the need “to pursue their own interests to a high

level” (p.179). Porter (1999) in her list of the kind of curriculum needed by the gifted also includes allowing the children “to pursue their own interests to a depth that satisfies them” (p.173) and Piirto believes that the curriculum should be specially adapted to take account of their interests. These interests can be existing or new interests and Tilsley notes specifically their need to develop new interests.

One of the advantages of encouraging development of existing or new interests is that this can allow identification of unrecognised abilities, which has been discussed in Chapter III. This has implications for the deliberate provision of opportunities for the gifted to develop special and new interests and thereby new abilities. Freeman (1998) supports this idea, noting from the work of others that their “leisure activities have been found to be a reliable predictor of future high achievement in that area” (p.17).

### *Creativity*

Much has been written about the nature of creativity and its role in giftedness, and this has been discussed in Chapter I. Creativity must be given a chance to grow and develop and certainly should not be stifled. This point is made by Passow et al.,(1993) who say the term is used in different ways and that some see it as “synonymous with productive thinking, divergent thinking, critical thinking and even problem solving and view it as a quality to be stimulated and nurtured” (p.896).

Freeman (1991) lists encouragement to develop their creativity as a need for talented children and allied to this a need to be encouraged to have the self-confidence to use their learning in different ways. She describes creativity as drawing on emotional and personality factors and says “it needs freedom to flower” (p.112), as opposed to successful academic achievement which is “more dependent on emotional control, as well as educational input” (p.112).

All too often the traditional classroom atmosphere is one which caters for academic achievement, such as the passing of formal exams and tests, mainly because

a large syllabus of proscribed work has to be covered and limited time is available. This can be quite constricting when it comes to teaching and learning styles, especially when class sizes are large. The necessary consequence is the kind of conformity and repression which Freeman (1991) points out are fine for producing good exam results, but which are “the enemies of creative activity” (p.112). She sees a need for the talented to be encouraged to develop their creativity. Fleith (2000), from her research with teachers and primary level pupils, came with them to the conclusion that a classroom environment which inhibits creativity is where “ideas are ignored, teachers are controlling, and excessive structure exists”. One which enhances the creative process is one which “provides students with choices, accepts different ideas, boosts self confidence, and focuses on students’ strengths and interests”. It is also one which “encourages sensible risks and allows mistakes”. (p.148).

Wallace (1983a) describes highly creative children as tending to be independent thinkers. She says “They will question authoritative statements; challenge the accepted rules and ideas; choose to do things differently” (p.7). It is hardly surprising that in the conventional classroom as described above, where there is pressure to cover the content of schemes of work, such children can be regarded as something of a trial, and far from being encouraged to develop their creative ability may even be positively discouraged from doing so.

McLeod and Cropley (1989) discuss all this in some detail. They emphasise the responsibility of the school to ensure the children acquire the necessary basic factual knowledge, but suggest that an over-emphasis on this can result in the neglect of creativity or even rather negative attitudes towards it, with the creative child “regarded as a nuisance, a troublemaker, or even a major classroom ‘problem’ ” (p.176). They observe that one of the problems for many teachers is distinguishing between creative and disruptive behaviour, which, bearing in mind the unorthodox approaches and responses of the creative, is not too surprising, for in fact their

creative behaviour can at times cause some disruption in the classroom. However, Cropley (1995) observes that being creative must involve behaving or thinking differently from others, for without this the element of originality would not be there.

Once again failure to develop their creativity, as in failure to develop their other gifts and talents, obviously must result in underachievement with all its concomitant problems. There are other undesirable consequences, well summed-up by Wallace (1983a) who says that “the future of society depends on the new vision of the creative thinker. Society stagnates unless it is revitalized by ideas and challenges injected by people who can look beyond the traditional and accepted norms” (p.7).

## **Summary**

### **Social and emotional needs**

Given the comments arising from the observations above there can be little doubt that there is a very real need for gifted children to learn as early as possible to cope with their giftedness. They need to be aware of, understand and accept it with its consequences and implications in a society or environment which may, at best, have rather negative attitudes to them or where peers and even adults may be openly hostile to them. The skills of tact and diplomacy need to be developed as part of their coping skills, so that any pre-existing hostility to them can be minimised rather than being reinforced, and so make them more acceptable within the age-peer group.

This acceptance is very important to the gifted since they often feel different and are easily made to feel odd because of their giftedness. Like all children they do not want any differences to be emphasised, they do not want to be isolated or set apart and are very anxious to be members of the group. In other words they need normal day-to-day contact with their average age-peers in and out of the classroom. Not only will this help to prevent any possible isolation but will also meet their need to learn tolerance of others less able than themselves. They also need occasionally to have

contact with peers of comparable ability, which is helpful to them both academically and socially, allowing opportunities to form friendships with those who have common interests, often something the gifted will actively seek.

Meeting all these needs will, in turn, help to meet their need to integrate socially and feel they are a part of society. This is a need for all children but especially for the gifted who, for the various reasons outlined above, must sometimes have to work especially hard at this and may need special help in achieving it. Development of good interpersonal skills will help them both in coping with hostility and in developing the friendships which are so important to them.

This kind of help can be provided by a good support system in the school and counselling within the school is seen by a number of researchers and writers as a social / emotional need, although the advisability of appointing a counsellor especially for the gifted is open to argument. Mentoring too is seen as a possible need for some. Vocational counselling and guidance is also needed, for in spite of their high ability and even because of it, sometimes the gifted have difficulty in deciding which of many possible careers to choose.

The atmosphere and ethos of the whole school should allow the gifted to achieve without embarrassment. This too is an important need with their related need for praise and rewards, which are just as necessary to them as to other children. This may be challenged as a special need of the gifted, but, in a society where academic achievement is often played-down in schools, it should be underlined that this kind of encouragement is important to them too.

A good, understanding and supportive home background is of paramount importance in helping the gifted to overcome their problems and difficulties. Best of all is where there is a well-developed system of home-school liaison, where each can help and support the other and any shortfalls in helping the child on either side can be discussed and resolved. Both home and school must be aware of these children's

need to have time to relax and play and to be children and not to be constantly pressured to work without relaxation.

An interesting need arose from the literature and was added to the list. This relates to the gifted understanding their good fortune in possessing gifts, their responsibility to society arising from their gifts and being encouraged to want to meet society's expectations of them, especially in terms of using their gifts to the benefit of others or society in general.

### **Academic and curricular needs**

Several of the needs outlined could be regarded as important academic / curricular needs of the gifted. For example, appropriate support and encouragement at home and in school is essential in the academic context, and a good system of liaison between the two. Counsellors, mentors and role models can also play an important part in both social and intellectual development and achievement of the gifted.

Such a support network can underpin a number of the other important needs of the gifted in this respect and perhaps most notably in their need to be kept highly motivated. The school however has the major role in this, for here the gifted can be kept motivated by being appropriately challenged, stretched and extended in all their various skills and abilities, including by development of their thinking skills and in making allowance for their different learning styles. Low expectations from their teachers, work that is too easy and unnecessary repetition of tasks already mastered and understood can lead to boredom and possibly, in turn, to underachievement and disruptive behaviour.

Some, even perhaps many gifted children rarely fail and some writers and researchers feel that being challenged to the point of failure will give them the necessary experience in coping with this. Some believe that they need the humbling



experience of failing, others feel it could be quite demoralizing for them and so it is a lesson which is best learnt early and in a supportive environment, such as that of the school, where they can be encouraged to see this as a positive learning experience. Failing as well as being challenged and stretched all helps the gifted to discover the full range of their abilities.

Contact with peers of equal ability can play an important part in providing intellectual challenge for the gifted, as can contact with anyone in or out of school who has skills, is gifted or has a strong interest in common with a gifted child. Such mentors, as noted, can provide much needed support and encouragement for children who require some extra provision to meet their intellectual needs.

The remaining needs are those associated with all aspects of independence. Gifted children need to be allowed, at times, to work on their own, but with care taken to protect them from isolation. They also need to learn to be self-directed or intellectually independent in their learning rather than all being too heavily prescribed for them and closely allied to this they need to be encouraged to learn with understanding and not resort to rote learning. Implicit in all this is a need for good learning / study and research skills and habits. Complementary to this is their need to work at their own pace, whether working on their own or not, with the need of some gifted children to work slowly and meticulously being recognised alongside the need for many to work much more quickly than their average ability peers. The latter sometimes need to be encouraged to study topics in depth, while those who enjoy this need to be allowed to do so.

Meeting these needs will help to meet their need to pursue their own interests, both existing and new, and opportunities should be provided for them to do so thereby allowing them to develop previously unrecognised abilities. All these needs relate closely to the need for those who have specific talents to have the opportunity to practise their skills to achieve high levels of performance, as in music and athletics.

None of this should be done at the expense of a good general balance in their curriculum, which is needed to ensure opportunity to discover and develop all their abilities.

The gifted also need to be encouraged to use their learning in new ways, including creatively. Their creativity of itself also needs to be encouraged and this has implications for methods of teaching and learning in the classroom, for creativity cannot flourish in an atmosphere of conformity and repression.

Attempts have been made throughout this chapter to maintain a balanced view of all these needs and to indicate, even by implication, that not all gifted children have all these perceived needs. Some may need much support and help while others will manage perfectly well, their temperament being such that they sail through their school years very successfully, needing little or no extra help from others. However, it does seem likely that most gifted children will need recognition and some system of support in varying degrees if they are to be happy and successful. A list of their needs as drawn from this literature review has been compiled, Table IV, and is included at the end of this chapter

### **Criticisms and Final Comments**

Some specific criticisms of the comments and suggestions of writers and researchers have been made in the main part of the chapter but there are some more general areas of criticism. While much of the research discussed was carried out with gifted children it was related to specific areas of need or general issues. Only one piece of research and resultant text has been discovered which was devoted exclusively to the general needs of gifted children, that being by Mason and Essen (1987). One of the most quoted listings of their needs is that of Ogilvie (1973), who

investigated their perceived needs but as part only of a wider research project. Similarly, Tilsley (1981) looked specifically at their needs but again as a part of a wider study. It is interesting that in all three of these research projects children were not directly consulted regarding their needs.

It would have been very interesting to have had the first hand views of at least a substantial cohort of children in each of these projects, to see the extent to which their perceptions of their needs matched those of the teachers and parents. This would have added credibility to the research findings, especially where the children's and adults' views were in accord, but it might also have resulted in some interesting additions to their particular needs as identified. Furthermore, a parallel study of the needs of average children would have made an interesting comparison and allowed some assessment of the extent to which some of the needs discussed were more marked in or exclusive to the gifted. Many researchers who carried out more general studies related to the gifted, for example Freeman (1979 and 1991), Gross (1993), Cropley and Dehn (1996) and many others as noted in the foregoing discussion, did work extensively and consult with the children and this lends extra weight to their comments in this respect.

In theory meeting all these needs of the gifted sounds very much like a matter of good educational practice and many of the approaches described would be helpful to all children. A major criticism, however, is the huge implications in all this for teachers who know little or nothing about the subject of special provision for the gifted. That they are expected to do so is made clear in various DfEE documents as described, but as yet there is no DfEE funded national programme of training in this area, only for the large urban areas. As noted earlier, it seems unfair to expect teachers to make such provision without being trained to do so, although many LEAs and schools are making every effort to bridge this gap.

Perhaps our greatest concern should be for those who come from homes where their gifts are not recognised or, if they are, the parents do not know how to help and support them or may even resent them. There is an urgent need for schools to have strategies in place to identify and make provision for such children if they are to have any hope of realising their abilities. This is well summed up by McLeod and Cropley (1989) who comment "It is at best inefficient to rely on nature or chance to develop talents, while for potentially gifted children in homes with limited cultural horizons it borders on neglect" (p.5).

In conclusion it remains only to echo the comments made at the beginning of the cost to society and to the gifted themselves of not making provision to meet their needs. That they do have their particular educational needs, which should be met, has, I hope, been demonstrated. The fact that many of these needs are also the educational needs of all children adds even further justification for putting strategies in place to meet these needs. Kerry (1992) sums this up very well in referring to "improving the lot of all able people" where he comments that "in the process, we would be providing a better educational service for all". (p.26).

**Table IV: The Educational Needs of Gifted Children as Drawn from the Literature**

**Social and Emotional Needs**

**I To be socially integrated and feel a part of society through:**

- An awareness, understanding and acceptance of their giftedness, its implications and consequences and coping with these by:
- Having contact with average ability age-peers
- Belonging to the group, not being singled out as odd or different, not to be set apart or isolated
- Learning tolerance of those less able than themselves
- Having contact with those of comparable ability
- Understanding their good fortune in having gifts and accepting that such gifts carry with them obligations and responsibilities to society

**II To have a support system as in having:**

- A good, well-structured pastoral support system, with counselling / mentoring, and a counsellor for the gifted
- Vocational guidance
- The ability to achieve without embarrassment and to have praise and rewards
- An atmosphere and ethos where academic achievement is recognised and 'celebrated'.
- A supportive home background
- Good home – school liaison
- Time to themselves to relax and play and not to be over-pressured

**Table IV continued: Academic and Curricular Needs**

**I To have a good general education through:**

- A balanced curriculum ensuring no area is neglected

**II To be challenged and thereby to be kept motivated by:**

- Having a supportive home background and good school support system underpinning curricular provision
- Sufficient and appropriate challenge in all areas of ability
- Learning to cope with failure and having humbling experiences but in a supportive environment
- Opportunities to discover the full range of their abilities
- Having contacts with those of similar abilities and interests

**III Independence in their study and in their thinking and learning through:**

- Opportunity and/or encouragement to be independent and imaginative in their thinking and learning, with development of good learning skills
- Good study and research skills and habits
- Learning with understanding and not resorting to rote learning
- Opportunity to work at their own pace
- Being encouraged or allowed to treat material / subject matter in-depth
- Encouragement / opportunity to discover and pursue existing and new interests in and out of the classroom
- Opportunity to practise and develop their special skills / abilities
- Encouraging their creativity and use of their learning in new / different ways

## **CHAPTER V**

### **PROVISION: MEETING THE NEEDS OF GIFTED CHILDREN**

For most of the educational needs specifically discussed in the last chapter it was indicated either explicitly or implicitly how they could or should be met. However, like any kind of educational provision, strategies for meeting the needs of gifted pupils should have a well structured and organised framework if they are to be effective. Rather than needs being dealt with on an ad hoc basis as they become apparent, there should be a school policy on the approach to be taken by the school as a whole to meet the needs of these pupils. I will therefore give an overview of the principal ways in which schools can organise their provision for this group.

The great majority of writers and researchers discuss provision in schools for the gifted under the headings of acceleration and enrichment. Others consider provision by various kinds of groupings as a strategy separate from the latter two. This is the format that I shall use here.

#### **Acceleration**

Acceleration is very simply defined by Cropley and Dehn (1996) as “completing the work specified in less time than foreseen” (p.15). In general it involves moving through the set curriculum faster or at an age younger than conventional, as when a child is moved up to an older age group and this is the most frequently used form of acceleration (Southern et al., 1993). This is a very controversial issue about which there has been much debate, but some have found it to be a beneficial strategy. Van Tassel-Baska (1993) notes that research on the long term effects of acceleration of the gifted has shown that this has positive results on cognitive development and does not adversely affect social or emotional

development. Callow (1994) also notes that if done in a caring way in co-operation with all concerned, then it can be a highly effective way of meeting the needs of very bright children.

However, there is also considerable unease about the use of acceleration as a strategy for the gifted, mainly associated with the child's social and emotional preparedness for such a move. A warning to this effect was voiced in a DES report (1977) which said that such a practice "presupposes a degree of all-round giftedness, and physical and social maturity which a pupil may not possess" (p.185). In the follow-up to her first research project, Freeman (1991) found that very few of those who had been accelerated at school had benefited from this, and some had found it had "presented them with such difficulties that at times it was detrimental to their greater well-being" (p.185). She also found that few of those accelerated had been asked if they wanted this to happen.

Judging from these comments it would seem that acceleration can work as a strategy for gifted children if they are emotionally and socially as mature as they are intellectually, and if those concerned are in agreement with the move including, and perhaps above all, the child.

## **Grouping**

Grouping by ability in the form of setting is a strategy which is much used in secondary schools especially in Britain, and 'setting' has been promoted in the DfEE document "Excellence in Cities" (1999) as a means of meeting aptitude and ability needs. Rogers and Span, (1993) have made a useful summary of the findings of a number of very large research projects on ability grouping and have come to a number of conclusions including that such grouping when it is:

"for enrichment , especially when enrichment is part of a within-class ability grouping practice or as a pull out programme, produces substantial academic gains in



general achievement, critical thinking, and creativity for the gifted and talented learner” (p. 590)

Comments on this have been made in the Chapter IV. In brief overview, Subotnik (1998), discussing other research, suggests that ability grouping allows extension of interests and abilities as far as possible and offers challenge and social support from peers. Supporting this view Moule (1997), from her own experience in gifted education, feels that in the interests of promoting healthy social and emotional development, children should spend a part of their time with those whose interests and abilities are similar. Amongst others quoted earlier, Passow (cited in Shore et al 1991) believes that the gifted should spend time with both ability and mixed ability groups, the latter for social rather than academic advantages. One major advantage this approach to provision offers is that it makes allowance for specific abilities, so that a student can be placed in a top set for just one subject where s/he has very high ability and otherwise be with mixed ability peers. It seems much preferable to acceleration where the student is in the older age group for all subjects regardless of varying specific abilities.

### **Enrichment**

Enrichment is regarded as having become the most widely developed means of making provision for the gifted in Britain (Montgomery, 1996a). From the earliest stages of its use it has been seen as probably the least controversial means of providing for them, with the main advantage being that it did not separate them from their age peers, taking place largely within the regular classroom (De Haan and Havinghurst, 1957; Archer, 1992; Callow, 1994).

It has been defined or described in quite a variety of ways and in the form it is being discussed here is sometimes referred to in the literature under the headings of

differentiation or extension. The definitions / descriptions tend to be rather general, but are as a whole well summed up by Callow (1994) who says:

“enrichment is taken to mean the widening of the curriculum by means of additional activities or subjects, and may involve the study of some topics to a greater depth than is normal for the age group” (p.15).

Enrichment activities take place mostly but, as will be shown, not exclusively in the classroom and the literature abounds with indications as to what strategies should be in place for *effective* enrichment. In Chapter IV the various ways mentioned of helping to meet the needs of the gifted are, in some cases, referred to as curricular needs in themselves. These together constitute the kind of provision which is appropriate for the gifted and any enrichment programme should include strategies for meeting as many as possible of their in-school needs.

As indicated, appropriate challenge is at the heart of the academic / curricular needs of the very able, with the consequences of not providing this including boredom, underachievement and disruptive behaviour. Any list of criteria for appropriate enrichment work, therefore, must include adequate challenge, either directly or by implication. Like many others Callow (1994) makes the point that this should be by quality rather than extra quantity of work, the boredom of ‘more of the same’ and similar strategies, having been discussed. Many writers and researchers, such as Poorthuis et al., (cited in Montgomery, 1996b) feel that materials provided should encourage and develop especially the higher order thinking skills. Davis and Rimm (cited in George, 1993) add problem-solving and creative thinking skills. Wallace (2000a) strongly endorses the need for teaching thinking skills to the very able, most especially problem solving and metacognitive skills.

In describing enrichment as adding depth and breadth to the curriculum and in expressing the importance of advanced thinking skills, by implication more complex and difficult materials are called for. Some writers make further reference to this, for example, Davis and Rimm (cited in George 1993) see a need for the content to be high

in complexity and Poorthuis et al. (cited in Montgomery,1996b) make a similar comment.

Reference is also made to the importance of enrichment materials encouraging motivation and independence / self-direction in learning (Tempest, 1974; DFE/Ofsted, 1993; Eyre, 1997a). Related to this, mention is also made of the importance of allowing a faster pace of learning to suit gifted students' individual need (Montgomery,1996a; Porter, 1999; DFE / Ofsted, 1993). Again related to independence, some feel that enrichment should incorporate allowing the students to develop their own and new interests (Kerry, 1983; Porter, 1999). This would help to add depth and breadth to their work. Poorthuis et al. (cited in Montgomery, 1996b) say that the students should be given opportunities "to explore continually new knowledge and new information" (p.15).

The role of effective enrichment in promoting the development of good social skills and in supporting social and emotional matters is also noted. In some cases this is in terms of developing leadership and communication skills (Whybra 2000). Van Tassel-Baska's (1993) views on affective development as part of a balanced curriculum for the gifted have been quoted. She includes development of leadership skills as part of the development of skills needed to cope with their giftedness and as part of general social and interpersonal skills.

Enrichment activities are not confined to the classroom but can take the form of a variety of extra-curricular activities which can be important in allowing opportunities for the development of both existing and new interests. Eyre (1997a) says these can be "highly influential in the schooling of able pupils and can in some cases be of greater significance than actual lessons" (p. 107). Freeman (1998) also sees such activities as important in this connection mentioning clubs and societies of all kinds, lessons out of school time, as noted in detail in Chapter III. The DfEE has also recognised the role such opportunities can play in offering enrichment by funding Summer Schools for the gifted and talented.

In all that has been discussed, the vital role of the teacher in provision for the gifted is evident and this also has been referred to in some detail in the last chapter with again much reference to this in the literature. To take into account all the issues described requires a very flexible approach generally and especially in teaching strategies which allow and encourage different learning styles, intellectual risk-taking and allow for other curricular and social needs. Eyre (1997a) sees the wider role of the teacher in both social and curricular aspects of provision as being vitally important. This all points to the need for the teacher to be at the heart of a well-structured system of pastoral and academic support for the gifted.

There are now many texts specifically on, or which make detailed reference to, how to make provision for the gifted. Some of these offer useful ways of incorporating more challenging enrichment work into teaching modules, for example Eyre (1997a) and George (1993). These are helpful for teachers and indicate strategies for making provision for the gifted as part of the regular curriculum, rather than this being a bolt-on.

To provide a programme of enrichment which fulfils all the criteria requires a great deal of work and careful planning to be effective. As noted several times, it also requires special training for those unfamiliar with such strategies for teaching and learning. However, what is required for good enrichment is what should be made available to all children, for it is essentially what constitutes good educational practice. Furthermore, as noted in the Introduction, Tomlinson (cited in Eyre 1998b), from the results of HMI inspections in schools, came to the conclusion that where there is willingness to make provision to meet the needs of able pupils the standards of achievement of all pupils will be raised.

## **Final Comments**

In conclusion I would suggest that there is no single means of making provision for the gifted that can be regarded as the ideal approach. It seems to me that a good balanced mix of strategies could be used, with enrichment work offered for *all* children, thereby providing those important *opportunities* for them to show what they can achieve, and for those who have already indicated this, setting can be a useful additional option. Even full acceleration should not be ruled out for those very special cases where the relevant circumstances are taken into account, including the feelings of the child.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

The main objective of this research was to discover the extent to which the particular educational needs of a group of fifteen very able students corresponded with the perceived needs of such students as drawn from the literature. Related issues explored were the extent to which these students' felt their needs were being met by their schools and the corroboration of their views by their parents and teachers.

In the discussion that follows, the first section is a literature review in which the general approach for such a study is discussed, including the choice of a suitable method to be used and the support and justification for this. There are then discussions on selecting a sample and methods of data collection and recording, with observations on appropriate interview and interview schedule structures. There are also comments on conducting the interviews, with final discussion on some ethical issues.

The second section describes the fieldwork, giving details of how the sample was selected from two neighbouring counties which, for the purposes of this study, I have called Knotshire and Bowshire. The approach to the participants is then described and the structure of the interview schedules. Details of the trial and pilot fieldwork follow and then the main fieldwork is described. There is a final section on the presentation of the data.

#### **A Review of the Literature and Research Approach**

##### **The general approach**

The methodology for such a study is virtually pre-determined by the nature of the inquiry. Eliciting the views of particular able pupils, but also of their parents and teachers, requires in-depth studies of carefully selected individuals, for the most part

conducted on a one-to-one basis and the approach used, therefore, must be essentially qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. However, such in-depth, one-to-one studies are so time consuming that the sample size cannot be very large.

Tooley and Darby (1998) support the place of small scale studies using the semi-structured interview, saying they provide “insights and glimpses of reality obtainable in no other way” and that they “have an important place in educational research” (p.43). Nisbet and Entwistle (1970) also believe that there is a place in research for the in-depth study of a small sample, but warn that it is very difficult to ensure that these are truly representative and so it is difficult to draw general conclusions or “generalize” from the findings. Hillage et al., (1998) echo this concern about small scale research which “fails to generate findings that are reliable and generalizable” (p.xi), but Lewis and Lindsay (2000) give their support to such small scale studies in noting that repetition of the research could allow later generalization.

The approach chosen for this research, with its one-to-one, in-depth studies of respondents, is not far removed from the case-study method. Gross (1993) used the case-study method in her study of exceptionally gifted children. However, she notes that because this method is not founded on direct experimentation, issues such as bias, reliability, validity and generalizability were, in the past, called into question. It is now more highly regarded as a research strategy, but Gross warns that researchers should take note of these issues. Such comments could equally apply to the essentially qualitative approach used here.

Van Dalen (1973) points out that when judgements about factors such as character and motives are being made, the researcher must also guard against subjectivity and support any conclusions with adequate evidence. There is, he suggests, a need to be aware of and guard against unconscious bias, faulty perception, deliberate deception and the desire of either the interviewer or the subject to produce the ‘right’ answer.

While this intrinsically qualitative method of study has been chosen and justified as eminently suitable for this particular research project, nevertheless, quantitative methods of analysis will be used where deemed appropriate and complementary to the text, insofar as they clarify and offer a simpler and more readily absorbed means of presenting the findings. Support for the use of quantitative approaches within qualitative studies is given, for example, by Van Dalen (1973) who, in referring to case-studies, states that they “may reveal relevant factors in a given situation that the surveyor can measure quantitatively” (p.210).

### **Selecting the sample**

In view of the fact that fifteen students, their parents and teachers were selected for the project this research falls into the category of a small-scale study. However, even in a small-scale study, attempts should be made to ensure the sample is as representative as possible, a point made by writers such as Nisbet and Entwistle (1970) and Oppenheim (1992). They point out that the sample accuracy, that is the extent to which it is representative of the group being researched, is more important than its size. The method for selection of the students will be described in detail in the fieldwork section. It was chosen as one which would ensure, so far as possible, that fifteen of the across the board most able pupils in the selected area would form the case-study group, and be representative of very able students. I felt these students should give an interesting insight into how such pupils view their needs.

Random sampling was inappropriate for this procedure. The chosen method of selecting the group was close to what Cohen et al., (2000) call purposive sampling, which they describe as researchers hand picking those to be included in the sample “on the basis of their judgement of their typicality”. They add that this is how “they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs” (p.103). Greig and Taylor (1999) refer to this alternatively as judgemental sampling. The disadvantage in using this type of sampling is that the judgements needed are not very clear cut or



straightforward and, to an extent, could be slightly subjective and therefore may not be entirely accurate, a point noted by Frankel and Wallen (1990).

Thus, in summary, providing there was constant vigilance to ensure that any pitfalls and disadvantages of the chosen method of research and sampling were taken into account, then the approach of the in-depth, one-to-one study of respondents, using purposive / judgemental sampling for selection of the study group, appeared to be an appropriate technique for this research.

### **Data collection**

The principal method of approach selected for students, parents and teachers alike was through a one-to-one interview. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) describe the interview as “one of the major tools of social research” (p.153) and for educational purposes see it as being of prime importance in the collection of data. The advantages of the interview over the questionnaire are discussed, for example, by Tuckman (1972) and by Best and Kahn (1989) who make comments to the effect that more information may be forthcoming in a good interview situation than a respondent would give in writing. Best and Kahn suggest that another advantage of the interview is that it allows more in the way of detailed explanation from the researcher than would be possible in a questionnaire, and that it allows different approaches to elicit the same information, thus allowing verification of responses and so giving a measure of validity to the data collected.

Reliability and validity are important factors in trying to evaluate how efficiently a system of collecting data does its job. Oppenheim (1992) defines them and comments as follows:

“Reliability refers to the purity and consistency of a measure . . . to the probability of obtaining the same results again if the measure were to be duplicated. Validity . . . tells us whether or not the question . . . measures what it is supposed to measure”. . . . The degree of reliability (consistency) sets limits to the degree of validity possible”. (p.144/5)

The process of triangulation is regarded as a very important means of increasing the reliability and validity of data collected in research. Graue and Walsh (1998), for example, see this as a means of avoiding or reducing bias and Gross (1993) mentions it specifically in connection with case studies. Tooley and Darby (1998) are highly critical of the lack of triangulation and consequent openness to bias in much of the educational research which they examined. They define triangulation as:

“a way of cross validating research. It uses methods of comparison to help assess the validity and reliability of the data collected. It can use several data sources or several data collection procedures, or a combination of these” (p.14).

In this research the data collected from the parents and teachers was used for a triangulation process in corroborating the responses of the students.

Frequent reference is made to the problem of bias and the need to be aware of its dangers and consciously guard against them. Cohen et al., (2000) discuss bias at some length emphasising that to achieve maximum possible validity, bias, the main cause of invalidity, must be reduced as much as possible. They quote a definition of bias as being “a systematic or persistent tendency to make errors in the same direction” (p.120). They suggest that one way of reducing bias and increasing validity is by the careful structuring of the questions asked so that the meaning is quite clear. Piloting the interview schedule was helpful in this.

Oppenheim (1992) also underlines the importance of consistency and precision in the questions used and in conducting the interview, as a means of avoiding bias. He emphasises especially the dangers of what he refers to as systematic bias, as for example where the interviewer tries to hurry the respondents in their answers or regularly offers one-sided explanations of questions.

### **The structure of the interview and the interview schedule**

Writers on research methodology, such as Bell (1993) and Borg and Gall (1983), suggest that there are basically three types of interview, the structured

interview, the semi-structured, guided or focused interview and the unstructured interview. The highly structured interview is used to collect information based on fact or opinion, such as in opinion polls, where open-ended questions are avoided. The unstructured interview usually is loosely planned and is described by Borg and Gall as being well illustrated by the approaches used by psychiatrists. They suggest that educational researchers are likely to select the semi-structured interview, where the interviewer mostly uses open-ended questions. They believe that for research where an interview is involved, this approach is generally the most appropriate, combining depth and objectivity and producing information which could not be gleaned by any other method.

From these comments it would seem that the choice of the semi-structured interview as the principal means of data collection was an appropriate choice for this research project, where the views and opinions of pupils, parents and teachers were being sought. A degree of control as to the topics covered was needed without undue rigidity and the semi-structured approach with open-ended questions seemed ideal for the purpose. Some of the more factual information required from the teachers about evidence of the students' high ability required a different approach. Data collection here was of such evidence as could be provided by each school, accepting that this would vary according to the school concerned.

Best and Kahn(1989) see the interview as a type of oral questionnaire, and emphasise the importance of preparation, especially of the questions to be asked. They point out that the written schedule will provide a structure for the interview and ensure the interviewer will get the required data. Gay (1987) comments that the written guide should not only indicate the questions to be asked but the order in which they are to be used and that in the interests of obtaining comparable data from the respondents all the interviews should follow the same format. Oppenheim (1992) underlines the important role of the interview schedule, especially in preventing systematic bias, emphasising the need for standardization of the schedule and of the

“interviewers' behaviour” (p.87) in preventing such bias and thereby ensuring validity as far as possible.

Prompts and probes are usually necessary during a semi-structured interview as an adjunct to the main questions in the schedule. Drever (1995) describes both as subordinate questions and gives a very straightforward definition of each, making the difference quite clear. The prompt, he says, is used to encourage the respondents to answer and to say as much as they can or wish. The probe is used to elicit more detail from respondents or further explanation in their answers to the basic questions.

Oppenheim's (1992) definition of the probe is in accordance with that of Drever (1995), and he believes that the probe questions should be included in the interview schedule. He describes the probe as giving the interview one of its main advantages over the written questionnaire, but also sees it as one of the “most serious sources of interviewer bias” (p.91), presumably because it can slant the direction of answers. Cohen et al., (2000) describe the probe as allowing more depth to answers or clearing up any misunderstandings.

In summary, it seems from all the above comments that for the purposes of this research the use of the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions, listed in an interview schedule which included the probes, was fully justified as the principal means of data-collection for the major part of the investigation. It allowed a degree of control as to the topics covered without undue rigidity. Some of the factual information required from the schools about evidence of the students' high ability required a different approach. This constituted a small but important part of the whole process and details are given later.

### **Conducting the interviews**

In the various texts much advice is offered on how to conduct the interviews. Some writers refer to the importance of the impression made by the interviewer in how she presents herself. Powney and Watts (1987) make comments on this

question of personal presentation in general terms, pointing out that clothes, badges, jewellery etc., can all send signals and could affect the respondents sufficiently to make them feel uncomfortable and influence their responses.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) believe that the personal characteristics of the interviewer are a main source of bias in interview responses. They quote the “key variables of age, gender, class and ethnicity” (p.165) as having a vital role to play here. Holmes (1998) also notes the limitations for the researcher which can be imposed by gender and ethnicity in particular. This is most unfortunate since the lone interviewer / researcher can do nothing whatsoever to alter or even “soft pedal” any of these factors.

The location of the interview is also viewed as important. Powney and Watts (1987) note that the conditions in which the interview takes place can have an adverse effect, causing bias in replies and also, in some circumstances, being quite distracting for the interviewer. They list locations not ideal such as rooms that are noisy, liable to constant interruption, have little privacy and are not therefore “conducive to the intimacy of an interview” (p.130), or have other strong associations such as the medical room. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) believe that the method chosen for recording information during the interview is most important and they, together with Powney and Watts (1987) and Oppenheim (1992), all strongly support the use of the tape-recorder for this type of interview. Oppenheim, however, emphasises the need to obtain participants’ permission to use this method. Disadvantages include possible constraints that respondents might feel when a tape recorder is used, as noted by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), who suggest that it should be located as unobtrusively as possible. Graue and Walsh (1998) warn of the many mechanical pitfalls in its use, like malfunctioning, and also that “dependence on a recorder can lead one to be less attentive” (p.118) than would be the case with hand-written notes. On the other hand, one of the main advantages of the tape recorder would be the far greater accuracy of data collected in this way, as opposed to the “pencil-and-paper” method.

Borg and Gall (1983) add that this can also help to avoid bias, since there is no fear of the interviewer subconsciously selecting the desired responses to record in writing.

All the above factors are very important in establishing a rapport with the respondent, which is vital if the researcher is to get full and reasonably valid responses. Best and Kahn (1989) believe that establishing rapport is “the key to effective interviewing” (p.187), and in the same vein Gay (1987) sees considerable value in spending some time on establishing rapport and putting the respondent at ease. Oppenheim (1992) goes into some detail as to exactly how this might best be achieved, for example, by starting off with very general questions not necessarily related to those of the interview schedule, such as asking the respondents to tell something about themselves.

### **Ethical issues**

Most writers on research methodology make a strong point about the need to take account of ethical issues, especially where children are concerned, such as obtaining permission or consent for their participation in research from parents, but also, if necessary, from their schools. Informed consent is an issue discussed in some detail, for example, by Greig and Taylor (1999) who describe this as the participants knowing they have a choice in whether or not they participate, that they know exactly what their role is and that they can withdraw at any time. Before consenting they also need to be aware if the research is likely to be published at any stage. Lindsay (2000) adds that children should be aware of both the short and long term implications of the research for them. These issues are enshrined in the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Guidelines (2000), where it is stated that informed consent should be obtained and, amongst the other requirements noted, there should be an understanding of the aims and purposes of the research.

A number of writers also make a strong point of the need for the interviewer to give reassurances about confidentiality, and especially in terms of protecting the

identity of those concerned, both people and institutions. Powney and Watts (1987), for example, make reference to this but warn that such guarantees should be given only if there is no doubt that they can be honoured. Frankel and Wallen (1990) also discuss this aspect of data collecting, underlining the need to protect identities by not using actual / true names and the need to assure participants of confidentiality. Masson (2000) sees assurances about confidentiality as a part of gaining informed consent from participants and BERA (2000) guidelines state that "Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous" (p.2). Such assurances are necessary to give confidence to those being interviewed so that they feel they can speak freely and honestly and without fear of any uncomfortable consequences or reprisals. Without this the likelihood of bias in the responses must become very strong indeed.

One final issue should be mentioned. In some of the literature a trial by piloting of the interview is recommended, so that refinements can be made as deemed necessary before the 'real' interviews. Borg and Gall (1983) recommend piloting, making the point that it gives the researcher / interviewer valuable experience in conducting the interviews. Oppenheim (1992) observes that while pilot work may be costly, it can prevent much wasted time and effort and help to avoid responses which are difficult or impossible to interpret. The piloting of the schedules is, therefore, important in increasing reliability and validity of this instrument of measurement.

## **The Fieldwork**

### **Selecting the sample**

The County of 'Knotshire', for administrative purposes, is divided into several areas. Part of the LEA has a selective system of grammar and secondary modern schools, elsewhere and in neighbouring 'Bowshire' the secondary schools are comprehensive in organisation.

The choice of fifteen pupils with their parents and teachers seemed a reasonable number for an in-depth study to be completed within the time-scale allowed for this research. The area chosen for the study was broad enough to allow schools to be selected from very different types of environment including industrial, non-industrial / rural and inner city areas. Five schools were selected and both grammar schools and comprehensive schools were included, widely spread across this diverse area, in an attempt to ensure that as broad and balanced as possible a picture was presented and not one biased towards a particular type of school in a particular type of area. The selection was made on a basis of personal knowledge of the area and, where this was inadequate, with advice from members of the LEA.

The staff in each of these schools, especially those who had an in-depth knowledge of the students in the year group concerned, were asked to select four Year 10 pupils, one of these as a “reserve”. These students, in their view and on the basis of all the evidence to hand, should have been the most able students in the year concerned. I felt that looking at pupils who were able across the board, rather than those with abilities in very specific areas, would lend an element of homogeneity to the study group, making analysis at the end a little less complex.

In selecting this sample of students there was the added dimension of attempting to keep a gender balance. For example, in one school where the staff were finding it difficult to decide which of two, one boy one girl, should be third and which the reserve student, since I had fewer boys in the sample at that point, I suggested the boy might be the third choice. The final research group consisted of eight boys and seven girls. I was pleased to discover that this group, without any contrivance, contained four students who came from backgrounds where one or both parents were from non-British or ethnic minority groups. This added a further interesting dimension.

The choice of Year 10 was based on the view that by this stage schools should have plenty of examination and test evidence of students’ ability, but also much



evidence from non-quantitative sources such as Records of Achievement and, arguably most important of all, teacher observation. In addition, at this stage opinions would not have been unduly influenced by results in public examinations such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Testing the students was not considered necessary since so much test / examination evidence would be available by this stage in their careers. I felt it was necessary to keep to a minimum the time I asked the schools / teachers to give to the project. Testing would have meant asking the schools to spend the time setting up the conditions for the test to be administered and might have resulted in a refusal to participate. Thus the method of “informed” teacher selection of the study group was chosen as probably the most effective in the circumstances.

### **Approaching participants**

As a part of trialing the pupils' interview schedule I asked two friends and their children who were perceived as being very able, as well as a teacher, to work through the relevant interview schedules with me and they gave helpful observations on all aspects of the process. A pilot study was then carried out in a ‘local’ comprehensive school. This followed an identical pattern to that of the main fieldwork as given below, with letters varied accordingly, and an identical method used for selecting the students as that described for the main study.

The format for the approaches to the various authorities and individuals which were involved in the field work was very much along the lines recommended by Powney and Watts (1987). Letters were written to the Headteacher of each school outlining the details of the research project and requesting permission to conduct some of the case-studies in the school concerned, with an undertaking to make every effort to preserve confidentiality. The letters also asked for an initial interview with each head should he / she be willing to allow the school to participate. (Appendix I, Letters 1, 2) All but one agreed and in consultation with the LEA another school of

the same nature in the same area was approached and the Headteacher of this school did agree to participate.

Following the initial visit to the school letters were then sent to the Year Tutors and Form Tutors of Year10, describing the purpose of the research project and explaining that the Headteacher had given permission for the school to participate. The letters requested meetings with them, including an interview with the Form Tutor of each student selected for the project and gave the same undertakings regarding confidentiality. (Appendix I, Letters 3, 4). The letters to the Year Tutors also requested that they would select the students for the research in advance of our first meeting and give details of evidence for their choices when we met. Subsequent visits were made to meet these teachers and to discuss the very able students that had been selected for the project, including a fourth 'reserve' in case either a student or his/her parents did not wish to participate in the project.

During the initial meetings details were sought of the kind of evidence used in judgements as to students' high ability and whether or not their ability was 'across the board'. I also asked if any qualitative evidence was used such as Records of Achievement and tried to judge the influence of teacher 'informed opinion' in the selection of the students. I felt that the task of identifying very able pupils in year 10 should not be too difficult, since the staff, by this stage, should know the pupils very thoroughly. Every attempt was made to obtain the same kind of data from each school, but this was not possible. For example, not all the schools used Cognitive Ability Tests (CAT) or similar tests or Records of Achievement. Furthermore, for a variety of reasons, it was not always possible to follow exactly the procedures described, for example, one Year Tutor was unable to participate in the research and the Headteacher acted on his behalf. However, in general the process as outlined took place and the outcomes were very satisfactory in that each school selected three very able students whose ability was, for the great majority, confirmed by their subsequent GCSE results. This will be discussed later.

When the pupils had been selected, letters were written to their parents describing the research project and explaining that their child had been suggested as a very able pupil who would be suitable as the subject of a special study. They were asked for permission for their child to take part in the research and for their agreement to be interviewed themselves. (Appendix I, Letter 5). At the same time letters were also written to the pupils individually explaining, again, the nature of the project and that they had been selected by their teachers as very good candidates for in-depth study for this research. (Appendix I, Letter 6). Their co-operation was requested in taking part in interviews to find out as much as possible about how they viewed their needs and the extent to which, in their view, those needs were being met. In all but one case the parents and students agreed to participate and in this case the reserve student and her parents were approached and they were happy to take part.

Contained within each letter was a guarantee that every effort would be made to try to ensure confidentiality and that they or any one referred to would not be recognisable. Reassurance was given that should any of the content of the final theses be published, their permission would be sought to use the relevant material. I also promised that a general summary of findings would be made available to those interested. Following all interviews letters of thanks were written to those who had given their time to help me with my work. I believe that in my approaches for consent to participate I honoured the various ethical guidelines as described earlier.

### **The interview schedules**

There were three different yet closely related schedules, one each for the students, their parents and the Form Tutors. The schedules were amended many times in response to suggestions from tutors as to how they might be improved and in light of experiences in piloting and trialing. There was no arbitrary dismissal of any suggestion. Following a discussion of the pilot fieldwork, changes made to the schedules consequent upon the outcomes of this will be discussed.

The main division of the interview schedule into two sections, one with questions on social / emotional needs and the other on curricular / academic needs follows the pattern used in Chapter IV in the literature section (Appendix II, Interview Schedules 1A,1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B)

Within each section there was further subdivision and an attempt was made to follow very broadly the pattern of these subsections in the questions asked (Table IV). Mostly this was achieved except in places where a question seemed to follow more logically slightly out of this sequence, as, for example, the question on acknowledgement of achievement, since any embarrassment arising from this could be directly associated with social difficulties related to the student's high ability.

Those questions which were not directly related to the lists of needs were designed to elicit the students' feelings as to how well their individual needs were being met, such as question 15 in section B on opportunities to discuss work and progress with the relevant staff. The opening very general question was intended to help respondents to relax and feel comfortable with the whole process and thereby to encourage them to talk freely. Without exception this worked very successfully.

### **Trial and Pilot Interviews**

#### **The trial interviews**

These were very productive. I asked the seven respondents to be critical of every aspect of the interviews. All felt that my approach as an interviewer was in no way intimidating or off-putting and one parent said that I gave her the impression that I really cared about the whole issue. All were quite comfortable with the use of the tape recorder.

At the end of the interviews I gave the respondents the list of perceived needs and asked if they felt all issues had been covered in the questions asked. They felt that the needs in the list had been well covered but some made general suggestions as to slight amendments which could be made in the initial letters sent to them. For

example, one of the students was concerned that her letter implied she would have to be interviewed in school, which would not have been acceptable to her. Appropriate amendments were made.

### **The pilot interviews**

These were conducted in a 'local' comprehensive school. Four students and their parents and three of their teachers were interviewed. The approach was exactly as set out above for all the fieldwork. A letter setting out what I was attempting to do was given to the Head of the school and an appointment was made for us to meet to work out the details.

The Head was very happy for me to carry out the pilot study in the school. From a remarkable data base compiled by the school on all its pupils and including CAT test data, she was able to give me the names of those she regarded as the four across-the-board most able pupils in Year 10. She said she would put me in touch with the Year 10 Year Tutor and through him I could then make contact with the Form Tutors of the four pupils for initial discussions with them.

The first meeting with the Year Tutor was very valuable, since he was able to give me more detail about the pupils. I gave him a letter outlining the scheme and copies of my introductory letter for the Form Tutors, which he agreed to pass on to them. I also showed him the letters I intended sending to the students and their parents. He agreed to arrange a meeting for me with the Form Tutors at a mutually suitable time.

This meeting took place shortly afterwards and the Form Tutors were fully briefed. Some clarification was sought but generally they were all four happy to participate in the research and to be interviewed. They were invited to read a copy of the students' letters and asked to give them these letters individually and privately and to allow them to read the letters in their presence. This would give the students an opportunity to ask any questions or to clarify any points. I also asked the Form

Tutors to give the students the option of keeping the whole exercise very low profile, to avoid any embarrassment they might feel.

The individual teacher's interviews took place in the school. In all cases the venues for the interviews were adequate for the purpose. Since I wanted spontaneous replies rather than premeditated ones, I did not give the teachers the interview schedules ahead of the interviews. I had thought I might do this to give them a chance to consult with colleagues to answer some of the questions about the students but decided against this so as to put their responses on a comparable footing to those of the students and parents.

Only two of the top three students' teachers were interviewed, the third did not turn up for the appointment, and did not respond to several messages asking her to meet me at some other time. The teacher of the fourth or 'reserve' student had, however, suggested that he should be interviewed before leaving the school for another job, just in case a student declined the invitation to take part in the research. The latter interview went very well but in the other two cases it proved extremely difficult to find times when these teachers could spare an hour. They eventually had their interviews and although they offered some useful information, neither knew her student very well and there were large gaps in their knowledge. It was decided that the solution to this problem for the main fieldwork would be to give the Form Tutors the interview schedules in advance of the meetings, so that they could consult confidentially with colleagues and so fill any gaps in their knowledge about the students.

All four students and their parents were interviewed, including the 'reserve' since her Form Tutor had been interviewed and there was, at that stage, no certainty that all would agree to participate. One was very slow to respond and from staff comments I thought she would refuse. They were all interviewed at a time and place of their choice. Establishing a rapport with the respondents was attempted by giving them some further details about this research project and inviting them to ask

questions about it. The interview then proceeded, with the initial reassurance of every effort being made to ensure confidentiality and a request for permission to use a tape-recorder during the interview. As described above, all were given a very general question to help them to relax, inviting the students to talk about themselves and their parents to talk about the students.

The general approach in the interviewing technique seemed to work well insofar as the respondents were all more than willing to talk and, after a hint of slight apprehensiveness in a couple of cases, seemed fairly relaxed. In fact some of the respondents were so happy to talk that their interviews ran well over the planned time.

### **Response to the pilot experience**

The whole experience of the pilot field work led to various amendments to the schedules. Listening to the trialing tapes and especially transcribing the pilot scheme tapes led to a number of such amendments but also helped me in the way I used the schedules in the interviews.

The very obvious time constraints on the teachers resulted in running the last three questions into one in teacher schedule B. They were all on the same theme, influences on motivation and achievement, not already mentioned, but separated into school, home and outside environment, or any other factor. The answers from the teachers interviewed suggested that it was not necessary to separate the questions. The same alteration was made in the parents' schedule for the same reason. This change was not made to the students' schedule, since this was the most important source of the data being collected and each question separately had generated useful responses from them.

Another example of an alteration to the questions arising from the Pilot was the addition of question 10, asking students who felt they had no problems related to their high ability to what would they attribute this? The responses of two students who had no such problems prompted this. On being asked as an unplanned probe

why they thought this was so, they gave very interesting responses very relevant to this research. A similar addition was made to the parents' interview schedule as well as one on how they would like to see the school's awards system altered where they felt it was inadequate. One parent had made unprompted comments on this which were, again, very relevant to the research.

The remaining changes were to the probes and these resulted from an analytical examination of the extent to which the questions and the probes were eliciting the kind of information required, relevant to the original list of perceived needs. All the areas of needs were being covered in the basic questions, which therefore were felt to be appropriate. However, I felt that in some questions the respondents' views as to whether or not the perceived needs were indeed seen as being needs and whether they were being adequately met, had not been very clear. The probes were modified to try to ensure that such information was elicited. The kind of comment added was "is this important to you / your child / the student?". For example, Q3 probes were completely changed to find out the importance socially to the students of different kinds of grouping. Matching alterations were made to the parents' and teacher's schedules.

A greater matching of the three sets of schedules, and especially of the probes, also resulted from producing analysis forms for transcribing the verbal data from the tapes into writing. During this exercise it became apparent that in just a few instances there was not quite enough matching of the information being collected and that for the triangulation process this would be important.

On listening to and transcribing the tapes I realised that my interviewing technique was faulty. I sometimes gave too much elaboration of open-ended questions without any request for this and also at times in my probes I "begged the question". I worked very hard to overcome these shortcomings and felt I succeeded, even to correcting myself when I realised I was doing this in the main fieldwork interviews.



From parents and especially the selected pupils, spontaneous answers, unprompted by the views of others, were essential and so the schedules were not distributed to these participants beforehand. As described, the pilot fieldwork also showed that Form Tutors did need help from colleagues to find out all the required information about the pupils and so, in the main fieldwork, the schedules for them were distributed in advance of the interviews.

The final much amended versions of the interview schedules did seem to draw the kind of data I was seeking and copies of these are included in Appendix II, as noted. The copies of the schedules include a sample of the probes used although additional probes of a similar nature were needed to elicit relevant information from some respondents.

## **The Main Fieldwork**

### **Approaching the schools and selecting the sample of students**

The schools were approached using identical strategies to those set out under the earlier heading Structuring the Fieldwork and used in the pilot. The Head of the first school visited asked for a format, in writing, for the whole research process as it would affect the school, including information and documentation which would be sent, visits to be made, who was to be involved each time and in what capacity etc. This was done immediately (Appendix I, Letter 2) and seemed to clarify the process so well that it was added to the general procedure pattern and suitably adapted copies given to the other schools in the subsequent visits.

Either during or following each initial visit an appointment was made to meet the Year Tutors and Form Tutors of Year 10 and the letters, as described, were sent to all concerned giving details of the research and what their involvement would be. Immediately following the visit, personal letters to the students and their parents were sent to the schools to be given discreetly to each student, with the reserve students' letters to be held until needed.

In selecting the students for the project, three of the five schools used the results of CAT or similar cognitive tests in conjunction with Key Stage Test results. One of these schools also had information from Target Setting Sheets. In the fourth school Key Stage and other internal school evidence was used although the basis for selection here did seem a little vague. On the other hand there was full consensus amongst the teachers as to who were their four most able students in the year group and teacher opinion in this school was helped by Records of Achievement.

In the fifth school the pupils were there as a result of their performance in other cognitive tests so were already selected on this basis. In this school very detailed internal examination results were available in the form of composite scores based on all subjects. Teacher opinion played a strong role in the selection of the students in this school. It was interesting that those opinions generally matched the other evidence quite well. The chart below (Figure 3) summarises the criteria available in the different schools.

Records of Achievement	X	X		X	
Target Setting		X	X		
Cognitive Ability Tests			X		X
Other Cognitive Tests			X	X	
Key Stage Tests	X	X	X	X	X
Internal Examinations	X	X	X	X	X
School	A	B	C	D	E

Figure 3: Evidence Available in the Schools for Selection of the Students

During our initial meeting to discuss the project and the students selected for the research, in three schools I was allowed to look at the evidence used but in the other two I was not offered the chance to view the material used by the staff. I did not

press to do so as I did not wish to spoil the goodwill by antagonising and it was not essential for me to view marks and grades.

As a follow-up to the main research I wrote to the students and asked them to send me their GCSE results as a form of confirmation of their high ability. (Appendix I, Letter 7). In all but one case these results lived up to expectations and in some cases were quite remarkable in the levels of success achieved. The exception was a student who, for very good reasons which cannot be detailed without a betrayal of confidentiality, had not achieved the results which could have been expected.

### **The interviews.**

In general these seemed to be successful and generated a great deal of valuable information, whether one or both parents were present. For a variety of reasons in some cases both parents could not be present, but this was not essential for the research and there was no discernible difference in the detail or quality of information generated in either circumstance. As in the experience with the pilot and trials there was absolutely no problem persuading the students and their parents to talk, in fact the problem was very much the opposite and especially with some parents. With hindsight I would modify the first question on the schedules, especially for the parents:

“Please tell me a little about your child's early development and school career to date”

Some parents spent as much as 25 minutes giving details, so that as a means of getting them to start talking it was really too successful. With some of the students the reaction to the corresponding question was similar. However, the advantages in terms of getting very large amounts of mostly valuable and sometimes unexpected information, did to an extent compensate for the excessive time used on this question. None of those concerned seemed to mind having spent more than the anticipated time on the interview, to the extent that a number of the students kept talking to me for

some time after the interviews about themselves and the research, which I regarded as a bonus.

Only one parent interview was not very satisfactory because it proved almost impossible in many of the questions to keep him to the point. The remaining student and parent interviews were very successful. Developing a rapport with these respondents was not difficult in any instance. I met many delightful people at all levels.

In the Form Tutors' interviews, giving them the interview schedules in advance proved to be quite successful. Most of the staff involved had tried to collect, from colleagues, the information for the questions from colleagues, some had gone to considerable trouble to do so. As was expected, the staff were not always able to answer all the questions. This was also the case for the parents, again as anticipated.

Some of the teacher interviews were the least satisfactory. Many of them were under great time pressure and it was clear that it was quite difficult for them to find the time for the interviews in the first place. Nevertheless, the data collected from them was useful and relevant. One planned teacher interview never took place because the teacher had an accident before the appointed day and then moved to another school a long distance away. I had not been aware her move was planned. My suggestion that someone else might be willing to be interviewed in her place was not successful. While disappointed I did have the interview data from the student's parents, both of whom were present. This allowed the triangulation process.

I had some interesting and thought - provoking responses to the questions and some that were unusual and unexpected. A number of those interviewed had interesting stories to tell, which sadly could not be used because this would make the people concerned easily recognisable. I tried very hard not to fall into the trap of elaborating on the questions without a request to do so and I was very conscious of the danger of leading the respondent or begging the question. I feel I was rarely guilty of this and where I was aware of doing so tried to retrieve matters.

## **Presentation of Data**

The tapes were transcribed and the transcriptions, with the originals, were used in conjunction for the presentation of data. All of the student tapes were transcribed first, followed by the parent tapes and then the teacher tapes. This procedure gave evidence of some interesting recurring themes, especially from the student tapes, which will be discussed later. The data are presented in five chapters, reflecting the essential structure of the list of perceived needs. The first two are on social and emotional needs and the final two on academic / curricular issues. The third chapter is on student support, a topic common to both sections and so representing a link between the two major areas of needs. At the end of each section there is a summary of the findings, with special comment on the themes and issues which emerged for discussion in the analysis and conclusions.

In each chapter the student data are presented first, with an emphasis on evidence provided by quotes. The chapters are subdivided into topics and some of the material lent itself to being represented in pie charts, so these have been included as a means of summarising the information from the students in certain sections. At the end of each chapter there is a section on the responses of the parents and teachers of the students. Since these were the principal means of triangulation / verifying the information given by the students, there is emphasis on the extent to which their views and comments correspond with those of the students. The responses of all three groups have been collated in a set of tables (Appendix III). The object of these was to allow an easily accessible means of assessing the levels of agreement as described.

The parents' and teachers' views were not available on every topic or were not sought for reasons given in the relevant sections. Levels of agreement in views were, therefore, on the basis of where their views were available relative to those students who made comments on the issue. Therefore, if ten students commented on a topic and in eight cases both their parents and teachers also commented and agreed with the

students this was considered to be a high level of agreement. These levels of agreement are summarised on bar graphs in each chapter. It should be emphasised that the figures used for the charts and graphs cannot be regarded as exact because they were not collected by a quantitative process. They are based on my interpretation of the data which allowed very general assessments of the numbers responding in different ways on certain topics. The charts should be read with this in mind, that is they can only be a very rough guide to the variations detected.

## **PRESENTATION OF DATA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The object of this research is to try to establish the particular educational needs of a group of fifteen very able Year 10 students and to analyse the extent to which these reflect the perceived needs of very able pupils in general, as drawn from the literature. In the literature section it was suggested that these needs could be divided into two major groups, social / emotional needs and curricular / academic needs, each having sub-groups (Table IV).

The data are presented in five chapters which reflect these groups and sub-groups. The first two chapters consider the responses to the questions in the Interview Schedules related to social and emotional needs of the students. Chapter VII covers the students' awareness, understanding and acceptance of their high ability, its consequences and implications and coping with these. Chapter VIII concentrates on social relationships, especially but not exclusively within the school setting.

Chapter IX discusses support for the students in all its aspects, pastoral and academic, providing a link between the chapters on the two major groups of needs. Chapters X and XI cover curricular and academic needs. Chapter X outlines responses on issues related to 'challenge' as offered by curricular and extra-curricular provision in the schools. Chapter XI concentrates on intellectual independence, the students' preferences in their approach to their work and their schools' attitudes and responses to this.

The main part of each chapter outlines the responses and views of the students on each topic. This is followed by a summary of the responses of the parents and teachers and a discussion of the extent to which they correspond with those of the students. For ease of access to this information and to facilitate comparisons, pie

charts, bar graphs and tables are included with each chapter. The pie charts give an overview of the students' responses, the bar graphs show the levels of agreement in views of parents, teachers and students and the tables give a simplified, combined summary of the responses of the three groups.



## **CHAPTER VII**

### **AWARENESS, ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF HIGH ABILITY, ITS CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS AND COPING WITH THESE**

For a variety of reasons the level and extent of ability of very able pupils may not be recognised by them, their parents or teachers, at an early age and stage in their schooling. This realisation may not come until relatively late in their school careers, especially where a very specific ability is concerned.

Once recognised not only by themselves but especially by others, very able pupils, particularly those who are academically able or seen as “clever”, can be resented and be the targets of very negative responses, especially but not exclusively from their peers. (McLeod and Cropley, 1989; Kerry, 1992). They need to be aware of this and learn strategies for coping with it, sometimes from quite an early stage. While it may not be difficult for them to see the academic advantages of their ability, especially as they get older and the significance of academic success becomes apparent, it may be hard for those who are targets of hostility to see the social advantages of being very able and therefore to be accepting of their ability.

These issues are explored in this section, starting with the students' early awareness of their ability, then looking at their present awareness of its nature and extent. This is followed by a discussion of their responses and attitudes to their high ability and its implications, starting with advantages which they can see in being very able, their feelings of good fortune and any sense of responsibility they feel arising from their high ability. The extent to which they are targets of negative responses and how they cope with these and any other problems consequent upon their high ability are also considered. There is then an examination of the systems of awards and open or public recognition of achievement in the students' schools, this being of significance in responses to them by their peers, which could in turn affect their

attitudes to their ability. Finally there is an overview of the responses of the students' parents and form teachers/tutors on these issues, with discussion of the level of correspondence in the comments of the three groups.

### **Early Awareness of Ability**

At the time of the interviews with them all of the students were very aware of their high ability. However, five of the fifteen students had only become fully aware of the extent of their ability when they took their National Curriculum Tests, commonly known as SATs, in Year 6 at primary school. Reflecting on the impact their SATs results had on their awareness some of the students commented:

“I didn't really think about it (having high ability) like that until when I had the SATs results when I was in Year 6, and then I got straight 5's and that was higher than anyone else had got. For things in middle school they don't exactly have groups ... for that ... (ability). The only thing they really had tests in were spellings and times tables..... . I didn't really think about it then as if I were actually high ability”. (Richard)

“It was probably when I was in middle school, after we'd done our SATs in Year 6 .... because of the grades I got in that, I got two 5s and a 4 and quite a lot of my friends got 4s or sometimes 3s, and so then I kind of realised that I was maybe more able than my other friends, and then in Year 7 we, me and one of my girl-friends and two of the boys in my class had to go out of lessons sometimes and I realised that was probably because we were the most able in our class, and we had to do things with other teachers instead of being in our class all the time”. (Margaret)

Prior to this Margaret had attributed her success to her friends finding the work difficult rather than to her being very able and four other students also attributed early achievement to factors other than their high ability. For one student full awareness of her true ability came even later when she had been in her secondary school for about a year and realised:

“that I was clever even when I'm with clever people”. (Alexa)

Another felt that her slow realisation of her true ability, well into her early schooling, stemmed from believing initially that her success was because:

“I got pushed harder than everyone else”. (Naomi)

The other three became aware of their high ability at quite a late stage in their primary school careers, in one case where the student was placed in high ability groups in Year 6. For one of the other two students, while results of an assessment test taken in Year 6 were important in confirming his new awareness, he and the other student only became really aware of their high ability when they started winning prizes:

“At the end of the fifth year I got this award ..... I just thought it was because I was working hard as opposed to me being actually very clever; and then in the sixth year I was still getting awards and these were achievement awards and it dawned on me that I was more able than a lot of people in my class”. (Fiona)

The remaining five students were all aware from an early stage that they had high ability. One of these believed he was able in primary school and the other four found from early in their schooling that they could do the work quickly and easily. Another had any necessary confirmation of her high ability given by the results of an assessment test taken in Year 6, but thought she became aware of it:

“probably about six - quite young .... perhaps not even that young ..... probably when I started to get a bit older and we were working differently as a class that I was able to know ‘hey I can do this and I'm faster than everybody else and it's not that difficult’ and I didn't really have a problem with the work it just sort of happened”. (Lisa)

In summary, Figure 4 below gives an overview of the students’ responses. One of the main issues to emerge in this section was the important part played by the various types of assessment tests in raising awareness of their full ability in some students or in confirming their high ability for others. Another theme which emerged

from the comments of several students was that of attributing their achievements to factors other than their high ability. This raises questions as to whether or not their schools by policy did nothing to draw attention to high ability in their pupils and the reasons for this. The parents' role is also interesting. Another interesting issue is the reasons for very early awareness in a minority of the students and the extent to which this was also the outcome of the approach of teachers and parents or because of chance factors.

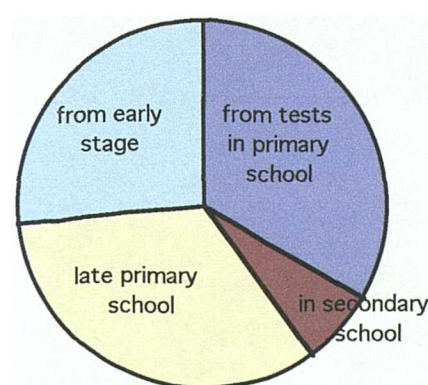


Figure 4: Students' Stage of Awareness of Ability

### **Current Awareness of High Ability**

At the time they were interviewed, all of the students were fully aware of their high ability and could analyse very objectively the areas where they had strengths and those where they had to work especially hard or even had a struggle to keep up to the standard of the others. They were asked to comment on their ability in areas such as the creative arts, physical and practical skills as well as the academic subjects. Comments on their leadership and social skills were also available from answers to various questions. Since these issues are discussed in some detail in later sections only a brief overview of the students' responses is given here.

Four students felt they were able across the full spectrum of abilities with no areas which they found more difficult than others or where they had to work harder. The remaining eleven felt that while their ability was fairly evenly spread, for seven there were areas of the curriculum where they had greater strengths and for four areas where they had to work harder, this to an extent being the same thing. Amongst these eleven were four students who felt they were not entirely socially self-confident and one who was working to improve his interpersonal skills, in all cases these being minor problems. Figure 5 summarises these responses.

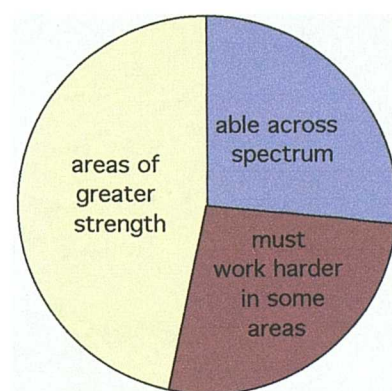


Figure 5: Students' Current Awareness of Ability

In summary, the picture given by the students is that across the whole spectrum of ability they had no areas of major weakness. This endorsed their schools' view of their all-round ability, including all the academic areas, which would make them the kind of 'clever' students who can be the targets of negative attitudes. Those who mentioned lack of self-confidence or needing to improve their interpersonal skills, saw this as a small problem, only affecting them in certain circumstances. These issues are discussed in some detail in the chapters on challenge and the Discussion.

## **Attitudes and Responses to the Advantages and Responsibilities of High Ability**

Information was collected as to whether or not the students could see advantages in having high ability, generally felt fortunate in being very able and whether or not they felt any sense of responsibility related to this. Some of the students were unsure how to respond to this latter question and it was suggested to them that that they might, for example, feel a desire to “give back” in some way. Where further help was needed I added that they might do this perhaps by helping others not so able as themselves. This is why some of their responses make particular reference to these ideas.

All of the students were happy and comfortable with their high ability and had been since becoming aware of it, with only one exception. This student at one stage felt uncomfortable with her ability and found it embarrassing when she got higher grades than others. However, this had been very transitory and no longer existed. She said that when she realised that she was able:

“I didn't worry about it because most of the people in my family are quite able, so it's OK to be able at home”. (Alexa)

One student was not only happy and comfortable with his high ability but also felt proud of it, while two others said that when they first became aware of their high ability they too were not just happy about this but were proud, one commenting:

“I was a bit proud of it .... now I don't try to flaunt it as much as I would have, because I know that people don't like you if you go around saying ‘Oh, I'm brilliant at this and you're not’”. (Fiona)

Nine of the students could see certain social advantages arising from their ability, especially in relationships with others. Four of these valued the opportunities it brought to meet different groups of people. Because of a high musical ability and a very active extra-curricular musical life, one came into contact with people he would

not otherwise have met outside school. The other three made similar contacts because of their sporting activities, all having a high ability in this area and being very active in sport both in and out of school. One of these observed:

“With sport ... when we have district trials ... you make friends with people there who you wouldn't have otherwise known. .... You meet a lot of people ... in .. especially the sports club (outside school) .. they're popular sports so you get to meet adults as well”. (Thomas)

The other five students felt that having high ability helped their relationships in other ways. Three of these felt that being able to help others with their work, because of their ability, helped relationships with their peers. The other two felt their high ability was of benefit in their relationships with adults:

“I guess if you're more intelligent, then you're more likely to be witty and more likely to get on with people older than you because you'll be able to talk to them properly and I think if you're of high ability then you generally are a bit quicker so you are more perceptive and I think you have better friendships with people. Also you tend to see past people's initial face ... what people first appear to be”. (Fiona)

Advantages other than social were mentioned by four students. All their comments related to the benefits of their high ability for their future careers:

“It's good because it means when you leave school you'll hopefully get good exam marks, go to college, do well there, maybe university, and you'll do well in life”. (Richard)

In relation to feeling fortunate or privileged, only one student said that she did not and never had felt any sense of being fortunate or privileged because of being very able. Of the remaining fourteen a few added qualifications to their comments on feeling fortunate. For example:

“Yes (feels lucky) ... especially when you see people that can't do it”. (Sara)

“I think I've always felt that I'm lucky and that it's easier to be clever than not to be clever”. (Alexa)

“It’s a nice feeling ... you don’t feel superior ... it’s just a good feeling. It’s nice to be able to do things and not have any problems and especially when you see people that do have problems”. (Lisa)

Ten students gave positive responses when asked if they felt a responsibility to give back in some way:

“People are expecting things of you sometimes and that makes me feel quite responsible that I really have got to do quite well. ... I want to do something worthwhile so that I can ... show my ability to other people and might help other people because of my ability”. (Margaret)

“If you can do something and somebody can’t you should, well, help them”. (Naomi)

“I take as much responsibility as I can at school and when people ask me questions I have a responsibility there to help them”. (Richard)

The remaining five students all felt they did give back in terms of being willing to help others, but did not do this from a conscious sense of responsibility to do so. In response to whether or not he had consciously thought about this one replied:

“I don’t think I have, I mean ... not really. I think it’s important to do your best. ... I think you should try and give help to others ... so that you can benefit other people as well”. (Thomas)

In summary, Figure 6 below gives an overview of the students’ responses. One of the important themes to emerge here was that all the students were happy with and accepting of their high ability. Two students highlighted interesting themes which related to perceived needs, these being the importance of attitudes and support at home and the need to be tactful / diplomatic about high ability in relationships, especially with peers. Another issue which emerged was the quite high proportion of the students who could see social advantages in their high ability in terms of widening the opportunities for relationships with different groups of people. These issues



together with 'giving back' in terms of willingness to help others, are discussed further in the next chapter.

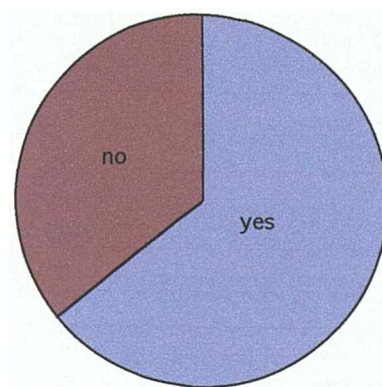


Figure 6: Social Advantages of High Ability

### **Coping With Negative Attitudes**

The need to develop skills to cope with various aspects of their giftedness is noted by Van Tassel-Baska (1993), but negative attitudes and responses (Painter, 1996) can be one of the more serious problems to be faced by the very able and the need to develop skills to cope with these is one of their important social and emotional needs.

Students with high ability, especially those who are generally academically very able or 'clever', can be the targets of very hostile responses from their less able peers. If these are particularly cruel, calculated to distress and persistent the student's work and social life can suffer badly, unless that student learns coping skills to deal with the situation.

Well developed social or interpersonal skills, including tact and diplomacy about their ability (Leyden, 1985) are particularly important for able students in such

circumstances. They also need to be able to relate easily and be responsive to others, especially the potentially hostile. They must also be able to cope with having their achievements publicly acknowledged, which happens in most schools, and the negative responses to which this can make them likely targets. Being very highly motivated and academically competitive can also be helpful to them in ensuring they do not allow hostility to affect their work and achievements. Support from home, friends and the school is also important in this.

This sub-section takes all these issues into account and considers the students' responses to questions concerning whether or not they have problems of this nature, if so, how have they coped with these and if not, in their opinion why not? Reference is also made to the students' views on their self-confidence and motivation but only briefly as these issues are considered in more detail later in a different context.

### **No experience of negative attitudes and responses**

Of the fifteen students eight had never in the past been subjected to any negative attitudes, nasty teasing or bullying consequent upon their high ability, and had no such existing problems. Although three mentioned some teasing each was convinced that it was friendly joking and not nasty. One of these, for example, commented that when she does well:

“People just joke about it and say, ‘oh you're so clever’ and all this kind of stuff and I don't really mind that ..... it's just joking”. (Margaret)

When asked why they thought they had no problems of this nature the students' responses showed considerable consistency. Seven said they felt it was because they were friendly / related easily to others and / or because of the way they tried to respond to others. Support from home was also an important factor in this for all of them, while four also indicated the wisdom of not being boastful or arrogant about their ability. Some of these eight students commented on their lack of problems as follows:

“I think it's the way I try and respond to other people, I think ... if I did sort of show off about it (her high ability) then I'd have more problems and I think it's because I'm willing to help other people and talk to other people and help other people who aren't as able, that they respect me for what I have got”. (Amy)

“I suppose I'm easy going, quite easy to get on with and mix well, so people don't have any reason to judge me just because I've got ability, they judge me on who I am”. (Thomas)

“If people want help I help them. .... You can talk to them and help them. ... I don't go bragging about it (her high ability) .... so that probably helps”. (Sara)

The remaining student felt she was not the target of negative responses because she liked ‘laughing things off’, but she also commented:

“Nobody really bothers about what ability they are, as long as they are nice people and you get on with them nobody really cares. You can mix with anyone”. (Naomi)

All eight students felt socially self-confident although three said that sometimes they could be a bit shy, a point developed in detail in a later section. Two of the three, in spite of their slight shyness, were nevertheless happy at receiving awards, one saying that she was comfortable with it and liked what she did to be acknowledged.

Only two of the eight felt some embarrassment with open acknowledgement of their achievements, in spite of the absence of negative responses to them. One of these, although slightly embarrassed, nevertheless also felt quite proud and in response to a different question indicated that she was to an extent academically competitive. The other, who receives a lot of awards of different kinds, although socially self-confident, sometimes found this difficult. She said:

“It's always nice to get awards and things but .... I think to some extent there's a limit to how many you can reasonably take before you begin to think well, shouldn't someone else be .... (getting some)”. (Amy)

There was therefore no suggestion by any of these eight students that there was a deliberate attempt to conceal their ability to avoid public recognition of their achievements. On the contrary, they were all generally self-confident and well or highly motivated and, with only one exception, indicated that they were academically competitive, their responses confirming that they all appreciated the fruits of their efforts and high ability and were comfortable with its open recognition. Four of them felt that the ethos and atmosphere of their schools in terms of the way achievements were publicly recognised and attitudes to achievement generally, were factors in reducing or deflecting negative attitudes.

### **Some experience of negative attitudes and responses**

The other seven students were all having to cope with varying degrees of negative attitudes and responses to their high ability and some had also had to cope with this problem in earlier years.

Four of these felt their problems were relatively minor and, although they were aware of negative attitudes towards them, these were not causing them real or unmanageable difficulties. Two had had problems in the past and to an extent still suffered adverse responses to their achievements. One of the two was bullied in his previous school, but only partly because of his ability. In his present school people did say negative things specifically related to his high ability:

“You're different maybe and they look upon you differently .... many people do say negative things, I generally just ignore it, I don't really care now ..... although ... when they mean it to be hurtful then yes, you do mind”. (Richard)

When Lisa was called names such as ‘boff’ when she was younger she says she liked this because it made her feel secure about her ability. She agreed that this was an unusual response and that others do not feel this way. She was still called names occasionally and while mostly she did not mind she said:

“sometimes being called ‘clever, clever clogs’ does get me down a bit, but I try to keep positive about it”. (Lisa)

The third of the four students had also been the target of negative responses in the past, but her and the fourth student’s experiences of such responses in their present schools had been very minor and neither considered there was a real problem with this. Another unusual reaction was given by one of these:

“People have been nasty to me but sometimes I take it as a compliment”.  
(Ian)

All four of these students had ways of dealing with any problems of this nature, that is they had or had developed coping skills. Added to this they all gave the impression at interview of having strong personalities and believed that in general they related well to their peers with only one who was having to work at this. Three of them agreed that this had been a major element in their coping while the fourth attributed this to his greater maturity and improved social self-confidence. All indicated the importance to them of knowing they were assured of support from home, and two felt that the way achievement was valued and rewarded in their schools, i.e. the ethos and atmosphere, was helpful in reducing negative responses. All said they were well motivated, with three feeling they were academically competitive, one strongly so. The public recognition of their achievements did not present problems for any of them:

“I’m quite happy when I win things obviously, ‘cause it shows I have put effort into things”. (Richard)

The remaining three of the seven students had more problems than the others and spoke in some detail about the negative attitudes encountered in their present schools. One used to be called names and he said this still happened but only occasionally. He commented:

“Sometimes it used to happen a bit in the lower years, like year eight, people use to call you names and stuff. Sometimes if people used to call you a ‘boff’ or something like that ... . It used to hurt .. I used to ignore it and block it out but there is

only so much you can block out. It used to get you and you'd think 'why am I bothering to try hard' .. you get told you're doing the right thing by trying hard and you think 'yeh if I'm doing the right thing why are people telling me that (I'm a 'boff')?'". (Andrew)

The other two were both very aware of the existence of negative attitudes in their schools:

"I think our school could be a really nice place if it wasn't for that attitude of lots of people towards high achievers. .... There hasn't been a day when I've gone to school and not had someone take the mick or make a comment or something". (Greg)

"I'm friends with people ... who are of the same ability as me because people who aren't generally ..... don't like that there are people who are doing better than them. I wouldn't say that we're completely isolated because we're cleverer but it does make a difference and some people are really nasty about it. .... I wouldn't say it's a major problem, I can deal with it, but, it does sometimes get to me". (Fiona)

In spite of their difficulties, past or present, these students had not at any stage attempted to conceal or play down their ability or to allow themselves to be demoralised and demotivated by negative attitudes and responses. Like the other four, these three students appeared to have strong personalities, felt they generally related well to their peers and were well motivated. All three were academically competitive and had learnt how to cope with their problems.

One said he coped because he had learnt to brush it off or laugh it off and made a particular point of the support given to him by understanding teachers. Another discussed such problems with a close friend who was also very able. The third felt her basic personality had helped her as well as the coping strategies she had developed. For example, as noted earlier, she had learnt from an early age that boasting about your ability encourages negative attitudes. All three valued support from home:

"I get told by Mum and Dad I'm doing the right thing ... they say ... whether you're clever, fat, thin, people get teased no matter what you are". (Andrew)

None of the three had problems with the public awards systems such as they existed in their schools. However, two of them were glad that the systems in their schools were fairly low key, one mentioning the importance of this in reducing the level of hostile responses.

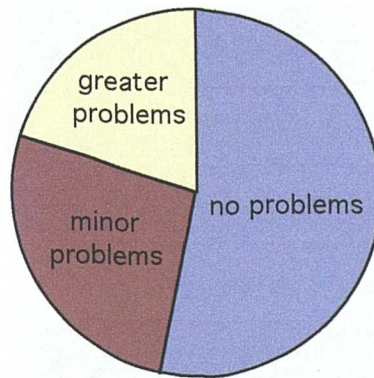


Figure 7: Problems with Negative Responses

In summary, Figure 7 above gives an overview of the students responses. The predominant picture to emerge in this section is the extent to which their good interpersonal relationships and the personalities of the students determined the absence of problems in terms of hostile responses or, where these existed, the way in which they coped with them. Related to this it also emerged that negative attitudes had not resulted in any student becoming demotivated or wanting to hide his or her ability.

Where there were no problems seven of the eight students concerned attributed this to relating well to other people. Those who had greater or lesser difficulties were helped by having the kind of personalities which allowed them to cope in different ways, as in the two cases where the students regarded name calling

as a compliment, the one who said it was because of greater maturity and increased social self-confidence, and the one who had learnt to 'laugh it off'. They also said that they generally related well to their peers, with the exception of one who was working on this to good effect.

A theme which re-emerged in this section was the importance to the students of support at home, and some added that support from teachers and friends was also a factor in their not having problems or in coping with them. Another repeated theme mentioned by several students was the need to be tactful by not boasting or being arrogant about their ability.

Issues also referred to were the impact of the ethos and atmosphere of the schools in any responses to high ability and how negative attitudes, for one student, prevented his school from being a really pleasant place for him.

### **Other Disadvantages of High Ability**

Four students out of the fifteen mentioned disadvantages, other than negative attitudes, related to their high ability. One commented on the limitations on friendships created by being in high ability groups. The other three of these commented on responses of others to them, for example:

"When you do a piece of work, the way that some teachers react is they're always saying 'some people will have found this very easy', they say that but everyone's still got to put that effort in ..... if you're able it seems as if to do that piece of work you haven't had to try at all when in fact you're putting in as much work as everyone else ... . Just because you're seen as able you're perhaps seen as not having done so much. ...

..... I think it's harder to make friends if they know that you're able and they're not as able and they feel that maybe they should step back a bit .... some people would see it as them trying to get some help or whatever. .... I think once you get to know people it's not really an obstacle at all". (Amy)



“I suppose sometimes you don't know if people are just talking to you because they want to know what the answer is”. (Sara)

Therefore, while only four students commented on this issue, nevertheless a theme to emerge is the different ways in which high ability can adversely affect relationships with peers. One student also raised the issue of teacher attitude to the very able, in terms of able students not needing to put so much effort as others into completing tasks set.

Relationships with peers and teacher attitudes and responses are issues raised again for discussion in later chapters.

### **Rewards and Recognition of Achievement**

As for all children, rewards for their achievements are important to the very able in terms of motivating and encouraging them (Pringle, 1970; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). However, the ethos and atmosphere in the school which encourages and rewards achievement is important for the very able (Eyre 1998a) in allowing them to achieve and be publicly rewarded, without embarrassment and without or with a minimum of hostile reactions from peers. The general attitude to achievement, especially academic achievement, in the school and the way in which this is recognised could, therefore, have quite a powerful effect on the attitudes of the very able towards their high ability.

Each of the five schools in the research project had a system of merit awards and these were not exclusively for academic achievement. All had some form of public awards ceremony, at least once a year, and these varied from the very formal to the very informal and low key but a public acknowledgement or ‘celebration’ of successes nevertheless. All of the students felt that the systems of recognition of their achievements in their schools were at the least adequate or alright and some described

them as good. However, three students, suggested ways in which the systems in their schools could be improved. For example:

“I think we get fifteen pounds (prize). ... I think it'd be nicer to have a five pound book voucher .... and spread it around a bit and give it for each subject”.  
(Alexa)

“I think there's room for more awards for people who are just putting in effort, rather than awards for people who are necessarily achieving something, because there's a lot of students who are working really really hard, all of the time ... and they're not necessarily getting as much recognition as they should”. (Amy)

Five students, while comfortable with their systems as existing, indicated that they would not want any more in the way of public recognition of students' successes. Two of these commented:

“Sometimes people can get ... quite resentful if someone is picked out quite a lot”. (Margaret)

“I don't think it would be a very good thing ... if they had every week ‘so and so has done well in this’, I think that would really alienate people if you had someone always getting the awards”. (Fiona)

The remaining seven students gave reasons why they thought their schools' awards systems or ways of recognising success were alright or good, especially where there were lots of awards. For example:

“If you're a person that doesn't really get certificates very often and you go and get one, then it's really a big moment for you”. (Naomi)

“Most of the time they're (commendations) not rare or anything .... you don't get it for doing absolutely brilliant work, you get it for trying hard and effort .. someone not very able could get it just for trying hard”. (Andrew)

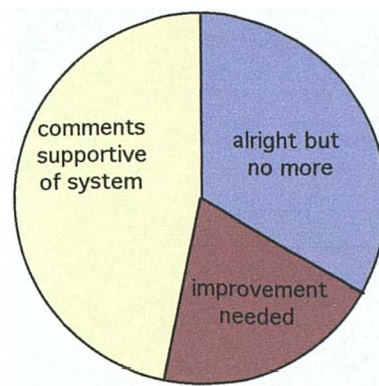


Figure 8: Responses on Awards Systems

In summary, Figure 8 gives an overview of the students' responses. It has been noted earlier that the students were all comfortable with such public acknowledgements of their achievements as existed in their schools. This section has continued this topic and one theme to emerge is a concern amongst the students for those who rarely or never received awards and an approval of systems which rewarded effort rather than only high achievement. The possible adverse effect on relationships if the same person got a lot of awards was mentioned, indicating an awareness of such reactions. The lack of hostile responses to the schools' systems of awards was also confirmed.

### **Responses of Parents and Teachers**

As explained in Chapter VI, in presenting the responses of these two groups in this and the four subsequent chapters, their views and those of the students are summarised on tables, so that there is an indication of the extent to which there is a correspondence in the views expressed. The responses relative to this chapter are shown on Table V (Appendix III).

The views of both teachers and parents were not available on topics where they felt unable to respond to the question. Discussion on the extent to which their views correspond or 'levels of agreement' of views with those of the students are on the basis of where views were available, relative to those students who made comments on each issue. Where the views expressed by the parents and teachers are personal rather than from the viewpoint of the student this is noted.

### Early awareness of ability

Only the parents were asked to comment on the stage at which the students became aware of their high ability, since it was thought unlikely that teachers in secondary schools would have any knowledge of this. The levels of response and agreement of views were quite low (see Figure 9) although in some cases the parents commented not only on when they thought the students became aware of their high ability, but also when they themselves did so.

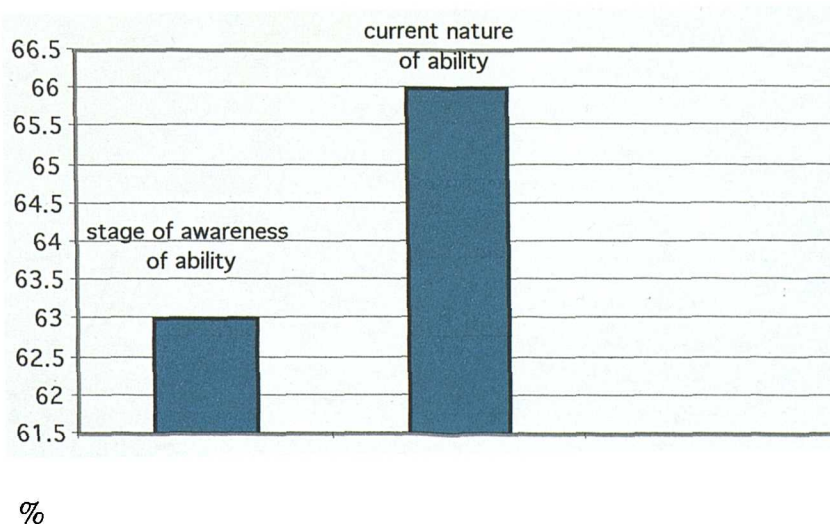


Figure 9: Levels of Agreement of Parents' and Students' Views on Awareness of High Ability

This was a topic which had not always been discussed and parents were not aware of the true answer in all instances, this being well illustrated by seven cases

where the parents had a very early awareness of the high ability but the students said they did not. Even more significant, in three of these cases the parents thought the students also had an early awareness. However, with only one possible exception there was no evidence that their parents had deliberately concealed the students' ability from them.

### **Current awareness of high ability**

Again parents only were asked about their view of the nature of the students' ability, that is whether their ability was equal in all areas, or had they areas of strengths and weaknesses. Information on this had been collected from school records and the teachers prior to the interviews. There is such a narrow difference between having to work harder in some subjects and having greater strengths in some that they are viewed here as being the same. The level of response was high but agreement with the students' own views of their ability was lower than in other areas (Figure 9). It is to be expected that the students would know more about their own areas of greater and lesser ability than their parents. They know where they have to work harder to maintain their high standards.

### **Students' responses and attitudes to their high ability, its advantages and responsibilities**

The parents and teachers were asked for their personal views on social advantages of high ability for the students. There was a low level of response but a high level of agreement of views on such advantages for the students, especially in terms of promoting their relationships. This was commented upon by only two teachers but by parents of nine students. On this issue the views of the parents should be reliable, since they were based on informed opinion of the students' contacts both in and out of school.

Another area where there was a good level of agreement of views but a low level of responses was on the students feeling fortunate in having high ability, that is regarding this as an advantage in itself. This is, perhaps, another issue which would not be discussed as a matter of course and so parents would not necessarily know how the students felt about it.

Levels of responses and agreement of views on the students' sense of responsibility related to their high ability were good (see Figure 10). These again were areas where observing students in various situations and perhaps discussing such issues with them would allow informed rather than speculative opinions, as illustrated by the following comment made by a teacher:

“He wants to do as much extra for the school as he can, this is why he’s so involved in the School Council, and if ever I need anything doing I could ask him”.

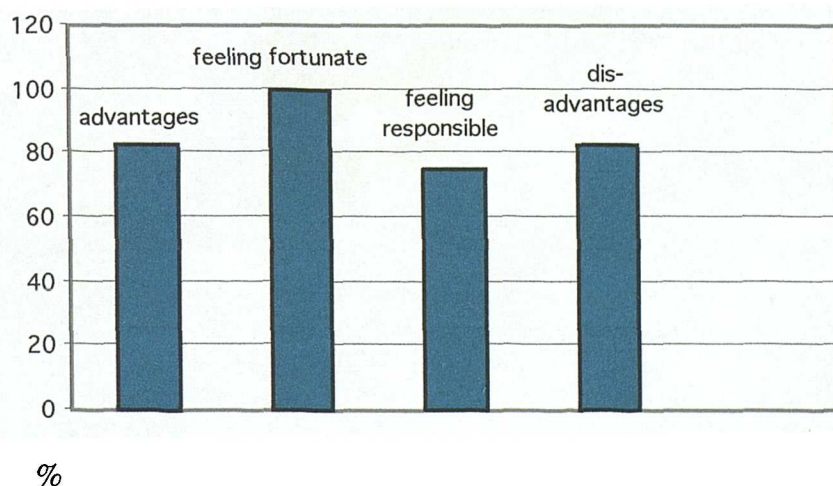


Figure 10: Levels of Agreement in Parents', Teachers' and Students' Views on the Social aspects of High Ability

### Coping with negative attitudes

The parents and teachers were asked for their own views on whether or not the students suffered from negative attitudes. There were high levels of response and agreement of views on this, but there were interesting variations within this area. All the parents and teachers of the eight students who said they had no problems of this



nature commented and their views corresponded with those of the students. Of the seven students who said they did have negative responses the parents and teachers of only four commented, but while all four parents were aware of this two of their teachers were not. This raises interesting issues as to why, amongst those having negative responses, there were some who had not communicated this to their parents or teachers, especially since two of those concerned were students who had quite marked problems. The following comments by the parents of one of these offers an interesting explanation:

“I’m always saying to him .. ‘have you got any problems’ - ‘No’- and I think he’d probably feel almost embarrassed if he had to come and ask .. it’s not the *done thing* to ask (for help)”.

Neither parents nor teachers made reference to social disadvantages of high ability other than negative attitudes.

### Rewards and Recognition of Achievement

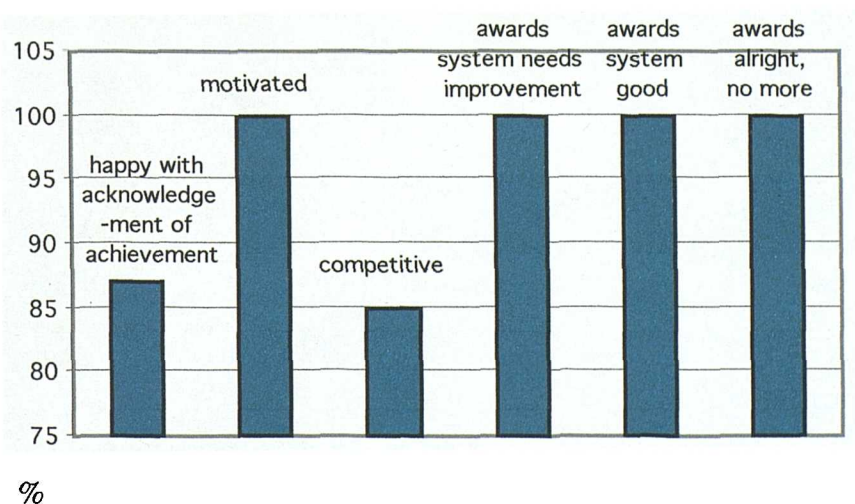


Figure 11: Levels of Agreement on Acknowledgement of Achievements and Related Issues

In the areas related to the schools' awards systems there was a high level of responses from parents and teachers. There was also a high level of correspondence of views with those of the students, especially on the students feeling comfortable with open acknowledgement of their achievements, their motivation and academic competitiveness (Figure 11). These are issues on which the parents and teachers would be likely to have a first hand knowledge of or at least be able to give a soundly based opinion about the students.

One interesting theme emerged here related to the students feeling comfortable with acknowledgement of their achievements, which did not fall within the area of the high agreement referred to. The parents and teachers were asked to give their personal views on the adequacy of the awards systems for the students concerned rather than how they thought the students might feel about this. Where the students had said the awards system was alright, but they would not like it to be given a higher profile, there was agreement where views on this were given by the other groups. However, quite a few of the parents and teachers of other students commented that they would not want any greater an emphasis on awards, mostly because of the adverse effects this could have on the students. One parent commented:

"I wouldn't want to see regular reading out of names or something for people who'd done very well .. I think in the end that would be detrimental because .. if the same person's name was mentioned that person would then think .. 'I'm going to get the reputation of being a swot here'".

On most other aspects of the awards systems in the schools, the level of parents' and teachers' responses was low but, when made, their views and comments agreed totally with those of the students. The exception was the issue of the awards system being such as to reduce negative attitudes, where there were no parents' or teachers' responses.

In summary, the views of the parents and teachers in this section correspond well with those of the students, but in some areas responses were low making the



levels of correspondence less substantial. The areas of lowest agreement of views were on issues where only parents were asked to comment and where their views were based mainly on opinion rather than observation or discussion, such as the stage of the students' awareness of their high ability. On this particular issue an interesting theme which emerged was that where parents had been aware of the students ability from an early stage but the pupils said they had not, there was no indication that there had been a deliberate attempt by the parents to conceal this from the students. This issue was raised in the section on the students' responses. Other areas of low levels of agreement of views were where the students were unlikely to have discussed the matter with parents or teachers. This theme was raised by parents who made the interesting point that embarrassment at asking for help would be the likely reason why the student would not approach them if experiencing negative responses.

There were much higher levels of agreement of views where the parents especially but also the teachers were in a position to observe the students' responses at first hand. For example, both groups would have been able to judge the students' reactions to receiving awards for their achievements and this is a topic they are quite likely to have discussed. A theme relative to this issue was underlined by some parents who said they did not want any greater an emphasis on the awards system. Parents and teachers were also well placed to judge issues such as motivation and competitiveness, where agreement levels were very high.

All these issues will be discussed in a broader context in the analysis chapter.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Children who are very able, particularly those who are academically able or 'clever', for a variety of reasons can sometimes find relationships difficult, especially with their age peers. One major reason can be because of the hostile attitudes generated by their ability, as outlined in the last section. Some of them especially enjoy the company of adults or older children because of the mental stimulation offered by these groups with their greater intellectual maturity (Freeman, 1979; Gross, 1993).

However, very able children also dislike being made to feel different or being isolated from their age peers or class group in school. Friendship and especially being a member of a group of friends is important to them (Whybra 1992). It is also seen as important for them to learn to mix with, understand and be tolerant of those of lesser ability, including the least able (Bridges, 1973; Leyden, 1985).

This section discusses friendships in and out of school, group membership and the responses of the students to the idea of working in small high ability groups or in isolation away from the main class group. Attitudes and responses to mixing with those less able than themselves, that is to mixed ability groupings, and especially to the least able are also considered. There is a final overview of the students' interpersonal relationships in general and the closely related issue of leadership skills. Therefore a number of the themes touched upon in the previous section are picked up and developed here, some of what is discussed being relevant, for example, to development of 'coping skills'.

## **Friendships In and Out of School**

The various ways in which the students are grouped in their schools and how these groupings have influenced and created opportunities for friendships, both in and out of school, are considered here. There are also comments on the students' friendships outside school.

In all five schools the students were grouped into tutor / class groups for pastoral and administrative purposes. No school selected the students for these groups on the basis of ability, which meant they were, even in the grammar schools, mixed ability groups. In Year 10, the year group of this study, in each school the students had some of their tuition in groups set by ability, the amount varying from school to school. Some lessons were also taught in mixed ability groups and some in optional groups for GCSE, which might be set by ability if there was more than one group. There was therefore a mixture of groupings in all the schools, giving the students every opportunity to make friendships on a basis other than that of comparable high ability.

### **Special friends and groups of friends**

Of the fifteen students ten had one or more special or close friends in school and without exception these best friends were of ability comparable to that of the students. The friendships of four of these originated from the time they joined secondary school. Two commented as follows:

“I've got quite a lot of friends, I've always had a particular friend .... we are very close and we like to talk to each other and go in each other's houses. ... I think she's very able. . . . I had to make totally new friends (in this school) I didn't know anybody. ... I tried to look at it as a positive new start, a new beginning”. (Lisa)

“Now I do actually have quite a lot of friends (made in this school) ... my best friend in school .... he's good at most subjects”. (Richard)

The other six students' friendships dated from primary school days. Some of their comments on their friendships included:

“My friend ... she's as talented as me ... we work at about the same level, so I've always had someone who's as clever as me, I've always had someone to compete with. .... I've known her so long (since first school) and I know her really really well. ... It's a really nice friendship”. (Fiona)

“I've got a good friend ... who's equally bright which is always a help. ... From Year 1 we've been in the same school”. (Alexa)

All ten of these students were or originally were in the same tutor groups as their best friends. The friendships had survived changes in tutor / class groupings and any separation because of varying option choices. All had been affected by some change, however small. One, for example, commented on how, because of major changes to group structures, in school he saw very little of his best friend:

“Last year ... we always sat together on the tables, but now ... they've rearranged all the groups so the only lesson I'm in with M now is tutorial”. (Richard)

The importance of membership of wider friendship groups, large or small, was endorsed by all of these students. For eight of them the basis of the group friendships was the tutor group and/or groupings for lessons. In terms of ability, they were all to a greater or lesser extent mixed in ability and had not been formed on a basis of high ability. In the other two cases the friendship groups were based on sport. For one of these the friendship group of boys was based on football although an extension of this group included girls:

“The people who I hang round with all play football, ... but we do hang round with a group of girls ... in a way they (the two groups) are interlocked”. (Greg)

The other student's friendship group was based on rugby:

“Mostly my friends at the school would be from the rugby team and from my form, because the way we've been set this year means that .. most of the rugby team is in my form”. (Thomas)

## **Group friendships only**

The remaining five of the fifteen students all had groups of friends rather than one or more very close or best friends. The students' friendships were essentially the results of having interests in common, with levels of ability not being a factor. The basis of the friendship groups of two of these was sport:

“Since I got into the rugby team I have made better friends .... in the first year and a half I didn't really make many friends at all, but after that, when I got into the rugby team then I made more friends”. (Christopher)

Two of the five belonged to friendship groups based on interests in common, or, as one expresses it, were the same kind of people:

“They all get on and work hard”. (Amy)

Like the other ten students, being a member of a friendship group was important to them. Two of them commented:

“It makes you feel more secure if you're in a group rather than one person”.

(Alan)

“It's nice to have people you can you know, talk with, have a laugh with, be friends with”. (Andrew)

All of the students either had some contact with their school-friends outside school and/or had groups of friends they met through out-of-school activities such as various types of physical recreation and church activities, both of which featured quite prominently.

In summary, an overview of the students' responses on the main issue is given in Figure 12 below. The image of the very able student as socially isolated was not reflected in any of the students involved in this study (Kunkel et al., cited in Porter, 1999). No student was a loner or had difficulty in forming friendships either in or out of school. From their comments on their friendship patterns several interesting themes emerged.

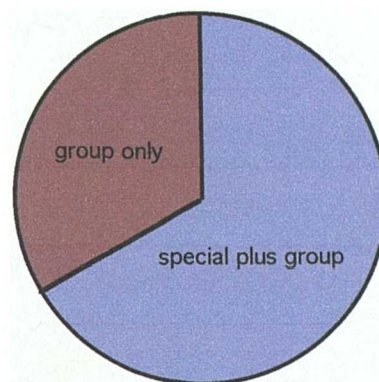


Figure 12: Structure of Friendships

Quite a high proportion of the students said they had one or more close friends and without exception these friends were of ability comparable to their own, this in spite of the fact that ample opportunity was provided for mixed ability friendships. All the students said that membership of a friendship group was important to them, but an interesting aspect of this was that, by contrast with the special friends, all of these groups were, in varying degrees, mixed in ability.

The impact on friendships generally of the schools' systems of grouping was quite strong. This was the basis of eight of the friendship groups, but here another interesting theme emerged in that the basis of four of these groups, all boys groups, was sporting activities, suggesting that this could be a gender related issue.

In relation to individual friendships the influence of the tutor group at first appears to be total. However, within this picture is the fact that in six of the ten cases the friendships predated secondary schooling.

### **Working in Small Groups or Independently**

Existing research shows that able students dislike having attention drawn to them because of their high ability. They dislike being singled out, set apart or made to feel odd or different, wanting to be like other children (Freeman, 1979; Marjoram, 1988). Their feelings on this issue are closely related to their feelings on group membership, discussed earlier, and were explored through asking them how they would feel about working in small groups withdrawn from the main teaching groups and working independently. These strategies are used in some schools as one way of meeting the curricular needs very able pupils. None of the five schools in this study used these approaches so the questions for these students were hypothetical, although one student mentioned, in another connection, that group withdrawal had been used in her previous school as a means of helping able pupils.

In one student's interview these questions were inadvertently omitted. Of the fourteen students who were asked these questions, eight were against the idea of group withdrawal. Two of these thought that in such an arrangement they would feel a degree of isolation, one commenting:

“I don't think I'd like that because ... you're more isolated ... you wouldn't be able to socialise as much, I think you'd be seen as almost outcasts, I think you wouldn't be accepted as much”. (Thomas)

Two others feared that working in small withdrawal groups would make them feel different, both preferring to remain with the others in their classes:

“I wouldn't like it ... it would make me feel different from everybody else”.  
(Naomi)

“I don't think I'd like that .... you'd just feel different and you'd feel cut off from what everybody else was doing even though you were doing something

properly, but you'd still want to get involved with the group activities instead of just with ... two or three different people". (Sara)

Another two did not like the idea of being singled out or having attention drawn to them because of their ability:

"I don't really like extra attention". (Alan)

The remaining two felt that such a scheme could create social difficulties, one adding:

"I think . . . that approach probably wouldn't work. I think .. some people would feel very insecure about it. ... I think a lot of people want to be normal, just be accepted that they're bright but actually that's how they are, they can't really change it". (Alexa)

Of these eight students five also disliked the idea of working individually, because of their high ability, perhaps in the school library. All preferred to stay with the main group and one would not like to be singled out in this way:

"You're in a group and to some extent you learn to work with other people who are in the same class as you and if you keep getting pulled out and being sent to work somewhere else to get along quicker, I just think it's not as satisfactory. ... For the first few times it happened then people would say things or make comments". (Amy)

The other three would not object to working independently but all had reservations. For example:

"I wouldn't mind it once in a while but I wouldn't like it really that often because it means spending more time with yourself than with other people". (Alan)

The remaining six students were reasonably happy with the idea of working in small withdrawal groups but five made qualifying comments about this, such as:

"Personally I'd like it. I'd be happy with it but ... (certain friends) would take the mick so much I guess it would mean I wouldn't hang around with them any more, but if the opportunity arose then I guess I'd be happy with that". (Greg)



“I would feel glad that I was getting the attention and almost proud that I'd been singled out, but I think that I'd also be aware of how the others would be feeling, not having this special attention. I don't think that perhaps it's very healthy ..... I don't think I **need** to have any extra special attention, I get everything I need in my own class”. (Lisa)

“I probably wouldn't mind very much but I prefer to work in a bigger group because I think maybe in a small group there'd be a bit too much pressure and I don't really like people pressuring me. ... If I was just in a group of six maybe I'd get to know these people quite well but then I'd ... not be as good friends with the people in the larger groups”. (Margaret)

All six of these students would have preferred to remain with the class rather than doing work independently, away from the group, but four, with reservations, were not averse to this idea:

“Most of my friends they're probably good enough friends not to .. exclude you just because you work on your own a few times, but if it happened on a regular basis you might .. end up not talking as much to your friends”. (Gareth)

The other two did not like the idea of independent work, done away from the classroom, for example, in the school library, one because of anticipated negative responses of peers:

“You're sitting there, you're doing your work and you're going to be thinking ‘when I go back to the class who's going take the mick out of me, .. should I be doing this because it means I'll get the mick taken out of me more if I do?’ ”. (Greg)

In summary, an overview of the students' responses is given in Figure 13. The dominant theme to emerge here is that most of these students had reservations about working alone or in withdrawal groups. Even amongst those who were not averse to one or other idea, the indications were that their preference would be to remain with their class groups.

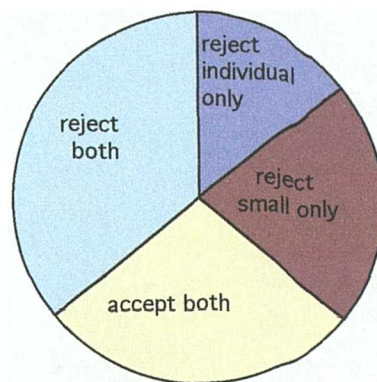


Figure 13: Working Alone or in Small Withdrawal Groups

The reasons given for this parallel the findings of other researchers as described earlier, and included concerns about possible negative responses from peers. One student also raised the interesting point that such a scheme would cut across the process of learning to work with other people in your class. These themes are developed in a later chapter.

### **Attitude to Ability and Mixed Ability Groupings.**

As explained, the five schools involved in the research had a mixture of types of class groupings for these Year 10 students. Questions and comments regarding differences between ability and mixed ability groupings, and reference to less able students, were just as relevant for the grammar school students as for the comprehensive school students, because of the wide range of ability even amongst those selected on the basis of their perceived high intellectual ability.

The students were all, therefore, in a strong position to respond to questions about their attitudes to pupils of varying abilities and to the social aspects of the

various kinds of groupings. Some of them also commented on the academic aspects of the different systems, since at times it was difficult to separate the two. The students' responses on the social aspects of different groupings will be described first and then their attitudes to those less able or with learning difficulty.

All fifteen students saw social advantages in mixed ability groupings, but their views as to the desirability of mixed teaching groups, for them personally, varied considerably. Three of them, while recognising the importance to them socially of having experience of being in mixed ability groups, nevertheless had a strong preference for ability groupings, also preferring friends of their own ability. Two of these commented:

“There's always going to be people who are not of the same ability as you. I mean if you're going out and you're working you're not going to be with all the people who are the same level as you .... so if we don't learn to work with people who are - have different abilities, then you know you're not going to be able to cope with that. .... I definitely like being in ability groups . . . I'm friends with people in my ability classes who are of the same ability as me”. (Fiona)

“If it's mixed ability, ... having a totally different - wide range of people. .... I guess you learn quite a lot about other people. ... I find it easier to socialise with people of higher ability and the same interests as me”. (Greg)

Seven other students could see social advantages in ability as well as in mixed ability groupings, four also mentioning academic advantages for them in ability grouping. Thus the existing mixed system of groupings in their schools suited these students. In general they all saw the advantages of mixed ability groupings as promoting a greater understanding and knowledge of those with less ability than themselves:

“You get to know different people's perspectives of things, ... the person that's not as able opinion on something can be totally different to someone who is able in the group”. (Alan)

The social advantages of ability grouping which were mentioned by these seven students included mixing with people with whom you have more in common. Four of these said that setting by ability had brought them into contact with people who were not in their tutor or class groups, three of the four commenting that they saw this as important in widening their circles of friends:

“I'd say probably it is good to have some setting because if you're just with the same people in every lesson you're not going to branch out on your friendships”.  
(Thomas)

“I think that the advantage is that you make more friends, before we just used to stay friends with the people in our class, I think that if we're mixed (not in class groups) we get to see other people and make friends with other people ... this is when we're streamed”. (Lisa)

The remaining five students saw no real social advantage in ability groupings, although three of these saw the academic advantages and so were happy with the mixture of groupings in their schools. All five felt quite strongly about the social advantages of mixed ability groups, for example one commented:

“You sort of learn to get along with people who maybe aren't as good as you and ... are different sorts of people, 'cause if you're in a group which is a top set then you're going to have people who are perhaps similar to you and you'll never learn to get along with people who aren't. .... When you go into the world to get a job you're not always going to be with people who are the same ability as you”. (Amy)

Two of the five would have liked to have *more* of their lessons in mixed ability groups. This would have meant that they would have seen more of friends of different ability and have had the chance to talk to people of different ability:

“Just because you are a person with ability doesn't mean you'll only talk to other pupils with the same ability, you talk to anyone, be friendly”. (Andrew)

In summary, Figure 14 gives an overview of the students' responses. All fifteen students could see the value, socially, of mixed ability groupings, this view

being expressed even by those who had a strong preference, socially, for being in ability groups. The reasons given in themselves raised some interesting issues and included learning to understand people of different ability and how they think, and learning to get along and work with them, this seen as important preparation for when they left school and entered the world of work. Where there were friendships of varying abilities the students pointed out that mixed ability grouping also enabled them to see more of these friends.

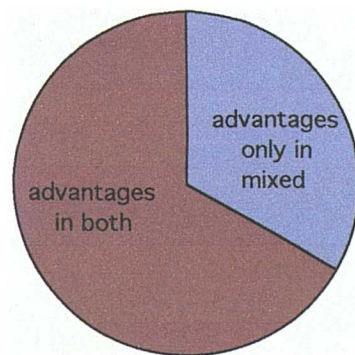


Figure 14: Advantages in Ability and Mixed Ability Groupings

However, within this theme others emerge, including the view, held by a large proportion of the students, that ability groups also have their social advantages, including their effect on widening opportunities for development of friendships and the opportunity to mix with those of like minds and common interests. At the other end of the spectrum were a few students who saw no advantages of any kind in ability groupings to the extent that they would have liked more of their lessons in mixed ability groups.

## **Responses to Those Less Able**

Regarding the students' responses to those less able or with learning difficulties, there was again some unanimity in their attitudes and comments.

Without exception the students indicated a sympathy and tolerance of such peers and all were willing to help them, none having any problems relating to them. However, seven students reserved these positive responses for those of the less able who were willing to work and were not disruptive. Three of these commented:

“As long as they are working - obviously working hard, then they've got just as much right to be respected for what they can do as anyone has .. whether they're able or not. There're a large number of people in my class who aren't as able but will work really hard, to do what they can, and I quite often help them, explain things, but it's the people ... who aren't able and aren't prepared to work at it that are the ones that I find it difficult to respond to positively”. (Amy)

“I don't look down on them at all I guess, ... there've been a few people actually that I've tried helping who have problems, who maybe weren't particular friends but I get on with them, I've tried helping them on a few things and explain things. ... There's two different kinds of people there's the people that aren't that clever, who would like to be clever, who try their best to learn things and there's people who aren't clever that don't really care - I don't get on with those people”. (Richard)

“I don't see it (level of ability) as a thing that defines them ... if you're doing badly it's either because you're not bothering or it's because you're not as intelligent originally and if you're not as intelligent originally, that's not your fault ... but I think if people are completely wasting it that annoys me really”. (Fiona)

Three of these seven students made the point that while they were willing to give help to those who did try hard and were willing to work, they were not prepared just to give them the right answers, but rather, as one expressed it:

“Set them in the right direction”. (Gareth)

The remaining eight students were all willing to help those less able than themselves, although three said they waited until those having difficulty asked them for help rather than volunteering, one commenting:

“I think that would probably be patronising, I don't think I'd do that ... I certainly wouldn't offer help. ... If they ask I'm happy to help but very rarely would I say ‘do you need it?’”. (Alexa)

The other five were willing to offer as well as respond to requests for help. Two said they helped those who asked for it but felt that it was important that they understood rather than just being told the answer:

“I really like to actually work with them rather than just tell them what the answer is”. (Ian)

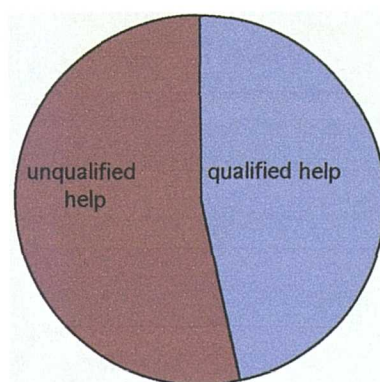


Figure 15: Willingness to Help Those with Less Ability

In summary, an overview of the students' responses is given in Figure 15. Not one of the fifteen students was rejecting, dismissive or unsympathetic towards those not so able as themselves. In fact, far from being unsympathetic the theme which emerges strongly is that of a general attitude of sympathy and a sensitivity towards them, as illustrated, for example, by the student who said she would feel that to *offer* them help would be patronising.

There is, however, an interesting variation within this over-riding theme of support and sympathy for the less able. Almost half of the students indicated that they had no sympathy with those who were not willing to work or who were disruptive. Another interesting theme is raised by the students who could see the importance of not just giving people the answers, suggesting their awareness that this was not really helping others.

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

The wider issue of the students' more general relationships with their peers and to an extent with adults was also explored, with the related topic of leadership skills, seen by some as so important to develop in the very able (Cropley and Dehn, 1996).

Only one student said that he found it difficult to relate easily to a lot of people, but was working on this. Quoting him on this and the other issues being discussed here:

“I try to take a lot of ... responsibility, because I like having responsibility. ... I'm trying to develop leadership skills ... but it doesn't come natural. ... Socially .. I've never really got on with many people. Well in -- (middle) School I had lots of problems with bullying ... I didn't get on with any of the boys in my class except for two, but one was my best friend. ... At my new school now I've found quite a lot more friends”. (Richard)

Four other students while relating well to others generally, nevertheless all felt a degree of shyness with certain people. One commented on this and his leadership skills as follows:

“I'm good at talking to adults normally. ... I've got a part time job after school and that involves talking to and working with adults. ... In school, in the classroom ... I like to take control, if we're doing group work I'm always one of the



few who gets the group together and tries to get them to do things. Outside the school ... I'm not ... one of the leaders of the gang. .... Sometimes .. meeting new people my own age the first time I'm a bit shy". (Greg)

Of these four only one did not feel she had definite leadership skills and did not like to be the leader:

"I get on well with most people. .... I get involved but I don't like to be the leader". (Sara)

The remaining ten students all related easily to others and they all also believed they had leadership skills. Two made the point quite strongly that they actually liked to be leaders:

"Leadership - I'm probably more prone to being too domineering and ... trying to be too authoritative. I'm OK if I'm working with people ... who don't want to be the leader too. I really like being the leader, I like being in command. I enjoy that and I think if I really want to I can listen to people and take their point of view and be under their leadership". (Lisa)

"I think I like to be leader, I like to be able to put my opinions across and take in others. ... I think I get on quite well with most people, ... I've got quite a good relationship with most teachers at school. ... I think if you have the right work ethic then you're going to get on with your teachers. ... I've got quite a wide group of friends as well". (Thomas)

One said she was always inclined to be a bit bossy, but she had learnt how to handle people commenting:

"I've got so much better at not telling everybody what to do but rather saying 'I have an idea'". (Fiona)

This student and two others indicated that they related very easily to adults or enjoyed adult company:

"I like to talk to people, not just people my age but adults, because it broadens the sense I have of everything, because I could just communicate with

people my age and I like doing that and it's great, but I like also talking to older people - seeing the world in perspective". (Ian)

In summary, while good interpersonal and leadership skills can go hand in hand, this is not always the case. An interesting picture emerges here in that while only two students felt they did not have strong leadership skills, one of these said she nevertheless related well to other people. Only one of the fifteen students felt he had problems in both areas although he felt that things were improving. The main picture to have been presented here is of the large majority, thirteen students, having good interpersonal relationships and well developed leadership skills (Figure 16 below).

Other interesting themes emerged alongside these. For example there was the very objective self-assessment by the students who were aware of an inclination to be too domineering or too bossy and the way one had learnt a more diplomatic approach in leadership. An enjoyment of adult company was also mentioned by some of the students. All of these issues will be discussed later.

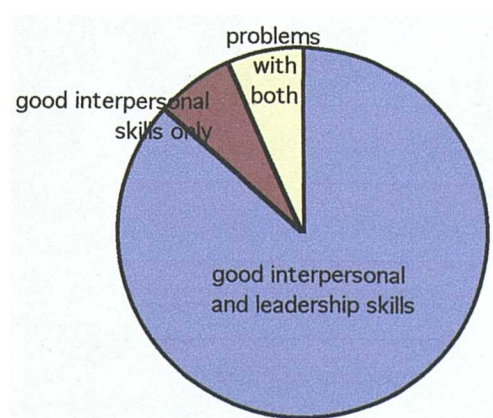


Figure 16: Interpersonal and Leadership Skills

### Responses of Parents and Teachers.

The responses of the parents and teachers on the above issues have been added to those of the students on Table VI (Appendix III). Both groups were asked to comment on all areas except on the students' reactions to how they would feel about working in small withdrawal groups or completely on their own. As before, comments on levels of agreement of views are on the basis of where views of parents and teachers have been given relative to those of the students. The wealth of responses and level of correspondence in views of the three groups were both generally very high in this section (Figure 17).

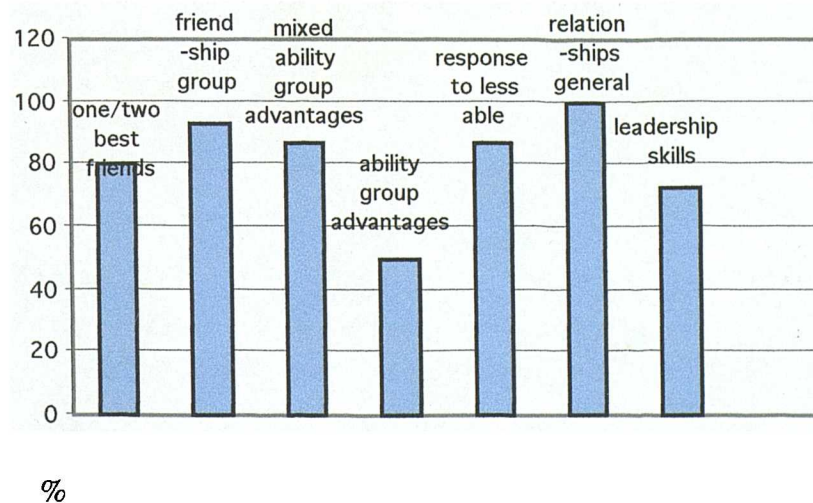


Figure 17: Levels of Agreement on Friendships and Interpersonal Relationships

### Friendships in and out of school

In the area of friendships and membership of friendship groups, only one parent disagreed with the student and his teacher in believing that he did not belong to

such a group. This was quite a surprising response since this parent seemed to be otherwise very well informed in all matters relating to the student.

On the related issue of special friends there was a very slightly lower level of agreement of views, where, of the ten students who said they had one or two special friends, the parents and teachers of eight expressed the same view. Disagreement for the other two was not total in that for one of them the parents' but not the teacher's comment agreed and for the other the parents disagreed but the teacher, when asked if the student had a best friend agreed with the student and answered:

"I would say yes, J. Z., . . (also) very able".

This high level of agreement on these two issues is not surprising, since parents and especially teachers are well placed to observe the students' relationships. This is also an issue likely to be discussed with parents, and friends are usually invited or brought home on occasions. However, on the question of whether the students' special friends were in the same tutor group, some of the parents were not able to answer this.

### **Attitude to ability and mixed ability groupings**

In discussing the social aspects of the different ways in which the students were grouped in the schools, the parents and teachers were asked for their own views on the general advantages and disadvantages of this for the student and especially its effect on friendships. They were not asked to speculate on how they thought students might feel about this. Therefore, levels of agreement in comments on the issues involved indicate the degree to which the three groups were like-minded, rather than a knowledge of how the students viewed these matters.

On the social advantages of mixed ability grouping there was a full set of responses here too, and while all the students could see advantages in this, thirteen of their parents and teachers agreed. The parents of the other two students agreed with

them but their teachers did not. In both cases the teachers, although seeing the social advantages generally of mixed groupings felt they had no special advantage for their particular students, one commenting:

“ (She) has already experienced several different kinds of junior schools, - very, very varied junior school experience, and I think she has probably already developed an understanding for the breadth and the variety and the diversity in the world. I don’t know that she needs to experience it again at this stage of her life. She will also experience it when she leaves”.

The lowest area of agreement of views was on the related issue of the social advantages of ability grouping although the level of response was quite good, giving some credibility to the agreement levels. The parents and/or teachers agreed in only five of the ten cases where students saw social advantages in grouping by ability. On the other hand, for the five students who did not see advantages in this, in only one case was there agreement. There was, therefore, an interesting dichotomy in the views of the students and the other groups, the students, understandably, having a greater awareness of the benefits this kind of grouping had for them, from personal experience in many of the cases concerned.

### **Responses to those less able**

In attitudes to the less able there was a full set of parent and teacher responses and, again, a high level of agreement of views with those of the students. The parents and teachers of thirteen of the students agreed with them that they were sympathetic and tolerant towards this group. Of the other two students, only the teacher of one did not see her as particularly sympathetic and the parents of the other had slight uncertainties about this commenting:

“I think he hasn’t got a very good attitude towards them, the comments I hear .. On a social level he will interact with people .. I think he would help, he is not unkind”.

The reservations expressed by some students in responding positively to the less able were also referred to by three of the parents and one of the teachers of the seven students involved. However, two parents and one teacher mentioned such reservations where students did not. In this aspect of responses to the less able there was therefore an interesting variation in teachers' and parents' views and students' responses.

### **Interpersonal relationships**

Only in the area of interpersonal relationships was there both a full set of responses and full agreement in views expressed. Even in the case of the student who was very aware of having to work hard in his relationships, his parents' and teacher's views were in complete accord. There were also full responses and agreement of views where the students said they related well to and/or enjoyed adult company. This very strong awareness of these skills in their students is not too surprising since again here both parents and especially teachers are well placed to observe at first hand the students' responses to their peers. In another but closely related area, in three of the four cases where the students said they were inclined to be a little shy in certain circumstances their parents and/or their teachers made similar comments. Nevertheless, as indicated above, all four were seen by their parents and teachers, as well as by themselves, as relating easily to others.

On leadership skills the levels of response and agreement in views were good but not quite so high. There were two cases where the students saw themselves as having these skills and their parents and/or their teachers did not agree. There were similar differences in perceptions in the cases of the two students who did not see themselves as having strengths in this respect. In one case while the teacher agreed with the student, the parent felt these skills were probably there. In the other case the

teacher felt, albeit with qualification, that the student was very strong in these skills:

“He’s a very good leader, unfortunately does not always allow others to be involved in the leadership side of things. . . . He’s done the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, . . . and on that his group were turning to him all the time. . . He’ll take leadership, no problem, but if you accept him as your leader you have to do as he says”.

On the question of leadership, the teachers would be better placed than the parents to observe this kind of behaviour in the students and their views likely to be more firmly based. This is borne out by the fact that generally more teachers than parents felt able to comment on this issue.

In summary the high levels of response and agreement of views in this whole area of social relationships suggests that both parents and teachers had considerable awareness of the structure of the students’ social lives, especially in school, and were well attuned to the way in which they were likely to relate and react generally to others. This would be expected where most of the parents and teachers were able to make comments well founded on first hand observations rather than having to speculate. However, even where they were giving their own personal views these reflected closely those of the students.

Interesting themes emerged within some of the issues discussed. The parents were unaware in one case that the student had a best friend and in another that the student was a member of a friendship group. This was a surprising lack of communication, which was not apparent in other areas discussed by these parents.

Another theme was raised by a teacher who felt that her student’s experiences in mixed ability groupings had been so rich in her previous schools that she needed no more.

As before, these issues will be discussed again in the analysis chapter, where they will be considered in the context of the overall picture.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **STUDENT SUPPORT**

The importance to the very able of support both in school (George, 1992) and in the home (Pringle, 1970; Wallace 1983a), and of good relationships between the two (Passow, 1993, 1995), has been discussed in the literature section. Without such support the students might be unable to cope adequately with social or academic difficulties and in either or both cases the result could be serious underachievement.

Support for the students and the importance of this to them in their social lives has been touched upon in the previous sections where the emphasis has been on social issues. Under this general heading of Student Support the full range of support for them is considered, both social and academic, in school and in the home and therefore this chapter offers a connection between the sections on the students' social and academic needs. Reference is also made to home-school liaison, vocational guidance and support, in terms of the extent to which the students are protected from undue pressures by having enough time to relax, having time to themselves and to pursue their own interests.

#### **Support in School, Home - School Liaison**

The schools did not make a distinction between the support provided for personal and social matters and that for academic progress. The five schools in the project had the basic system of the tutor group with form tutors, who were responsible for all matters concerning and affecting the lives in school of those students in the group assigned to them. In their prospectuses all of the schools emphasised that if students were having any kind problem or difficulty, parents were encouraged to



contact the school, some making this point especially strongly. Two of the schools also emphasised that the form tutor should be the first point of communication in this procedure. The other three made it very clear that they attached great importance to the role of form tutor, to the extent that parents could not fail to infer that this should be their first point of contact when there was a concern of any kind.

As an alternative to the form tutor, parents could approach the year tutors or equivalent, the deputies or the headteacher. Three schools also had systems of attaching older pupils to younger tutor groups to help where there were any problems. Another school had recently introduced a peer counselling group, constituted of sixth form students who were trained outside school for this role.

There was, therefore, a well structured system of student support in every school, with parent involvement encouraged, although no school had a member of staff specifically designated as a counsellor for more able pupils or with any kind of special responsibility for them.

### **Social support**

Considering first responses and reactions to social problems consequent upon their high ability, the seven students who had experienced difficulties were asked if they had discussed the problem with anyone. The eight who had not had problems were asked if they were to have such problems was there anyone they would talk to about it?

Only one of the students said his first approach would be to a member of staff in the school, commenting:

“He's an easy person to get on with and he listens to you, and I think it's important to have somebody outside of your own family to talk to”. (Thomas)

Another student would be ready to approach both his parents and an approachable form tutor, giving neither priority:

“If I felt the need I'd go to probably my parents and probably my teachers - well my form tutor .... my old form tutor, ... I think I could approach him and talk about it”. (Ian)

Three students did not say that they would make an approach to their schools at any stage. In fact one said she would definitely not approach a teacher, while the other two made it clear that they did not feel they needed to approach their schools in such circumstances. One of these, however, although relying mainly on his friends for discussion of any difficulties, nevertheless had found unprompted comments made by his teachers at ‘open evenings’ reassuring:

“They used to reassure you that people don't actually mean what they're saying, they're just laughing at you because they're not as clever as you. ... They knew what was happening”. (Andrew)

The remaining ten students would all have been willing to approach their schools, having first sought support from parents and/or older siblings and/or friends. In response to the question as to whom they have or would approach in times of difficulty one of these commented:

“Parents probably ... and then after that probably Miss X, Head of Year”.  
(Sara)

Another two of these ten students paid tribute to the way in which their schools had given special support socially and thereby had generated trust in their likely responses to approaches for help by students:

“A couple of months ago there was an incident between me and somebody in our school. ... the school agreed that it had been a form of bullying. ... Whatever we have actually brought into the school .... they sort things”. (Richard)

“One of my friends, .. some boys in her class were hackling (sic) her ... she went to Mrs X, talked to her and Mrs X had it sorted in like a day”. (Fiona)

Figure 18 below gives a summary of those whom the students would have approached when help was needed.

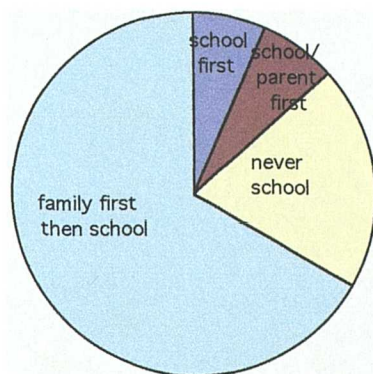


Figure 18: Those Approached When Help is Needed

### **Academic support**

In terms of academic support and home-school liaison, all of the schools held at least one Parents' Evening in the year for each year group and, if only one, this was mainly subject based. In every school there was at least one detailed report to parents during each school year, and some form of second report, which in most cases was much less detailed. Some schools offered additional opportunities for parents and/or students to have formal discussions with staff about work and progress, these varying according to particular schemes operating in the schools, such as, for example, 'target setting', which offered quite a considerable amount of staff-pupil discussion time.

Without exception the students had it made quite clear to them by their schools in general and/or by individual subject teachers, that they were free and welcome to approach their subject teachers outside the classroom should they need any extra help or guidance with their work. All the students appreciated and were happy to make use of such opportunities. Only three of the fifteen students, while feeling free to approach their subject teachers outside lesson time, nevertheless

suggested ways in which the *individual subject support* schemes could be improved in their schools, for example:

“You might have ten minutes every couple of weeks to discuss (your work) ... just to make sure of things”. (Alan)

On the other hand, another student said that there was plenty of opportunity to discuss work with teachers outside the classroom and that they made this clear but he felt that full advantage of this was not taken:

“They make that very clear, they're always saying that they're open for problems ... I don't think people use it (the facility) as much as they could do”.  
(Christopher)

The remaining twelve students' comments were also very positive in referring to individual academic support in their schools. One student, for example, described how the teachers in her school went to the trouble of letting the students know where they were each day should they need help:

“Most of the teachers .. have given out things and said ‘this is where I am on each of the days of the week and I am prepared to talk things through’”. (Amy)

Another described how he went and talked to his teachers “every now and then”, saying he liked this because:

“They know what they're getting from you, and they know what your strengths are and your weaknesses are in that subject, even though you may not know, and so whenever I go along .. not only does it quite often make me feel good but .. it tells me ... what areas I need to work on, which is good in communication”.  
(Ian)

Some of the students mentioned ways in which their schools gave them more *general academic support* or encouragement in addition to the individual subject support mentioned above, but from five students there were suggestions as to how this could be improved. One student especially appreciated the way in which her geography teacher made the students feel they were members of a club and also felt

the library facilities in the school were good. However, she also felt that the mixed ability groupings in her school had academic disadvantages commenting:

“When you're in a mixed ability lesson, with people who do play up, then, the way the school's organised, it's more important to them that they stop those people from playing up ..... and so if I were to put my hand up because I've finished or whatever in a lesson, it might take twenty minutes before the teacher comes, because when someone who misbehaves puts their hand up in between, they're more important because I'm not going to get up and start messing about, I'll sit there patiently and wait”. (Amy)

Three students felt that the resources or opportunities in their schools could be improved in certain areas. One commented:

“I would like to see a lot more textbooks ... in lessons ... instead of having to share one between two. ... You don't get given textbooks, which is really inconvenient for doing homework”. (Greg)

Comments on general academic support from the remaining ten students were all complimentary. Four of these remarked on the good resources in their schools, three making special reference to the fact that their respective schools were connected to the Internet. One of them commented:

“Before I had a computer at home .. we had opportunity to go onto the Internet - a lot of schools haven't even got the Internet and we're allowed as much access as we want, whenever we want, so that's ... a definite plus”. (Lisa)

Four other students mentioned specific ways in which their schools had given them general academic/curricular support. Two of these explained:

“There was a maths weekend once .. with a sixth form college ... it was just for the ... top set groups and the second set groups .... you were in a group of six .. of the same ability. ... It was quite good, I mean you got to know some other people”. (Alan)

“This year I'm doing twilight (lessons) after school, which gives you more to do basically - keeps you busy”. (Greg)

The parents of all the students took advantage of opportunities to attend Parents' Evenings or other meetings of a similar nature. No difficulties or problems associated with home - school liaison were mentioned by any student, either in connection with social or academic / curricular matters. Some students mentioned the importance to them of knowing this good relationship between home and school existed and the benefits they saw in this:

“They can come together and help me find out what I need and if I did need extra support then they would come together, they would help”. (Lisa)

### **Vocational guidance**

This was an important part of the schools' academic / curricular support system, although it could also be said to play a part in social support too. In the five schools in the study, vocational guidance was provided through a programme of careers advice and guidance. The student interviews for this research were carried out in the earlier stages of Year 10, mostly during the Autumn Term and in all the schools this was before the main programmes of careers advice had started. However, in every case some introductory work had been done.

Only two students knew exactly what they wanted to do in terms of a career, so neither had needed much in the way of advice to date. Two other students had an idea of the area of careers that would interest them and both had used their school facilities to find out more about these careers. The remaining ten students (the question was inadvertently omitted for one) had not made any final decisions as to the careers they would like to follow. Their comments suggested that they felt it was 'early days'.

While most students had used their schools facilities, mainly through the introductory courses offered, none had actively sought careers advice in their schools. However, two felt they would need some guidance in this later because they were likely to have difficulty in deciding what to do, one commenting:

“Because I'm what's sometimes termed as an all-rounder . . . I have found it very difficult to choose something to channel my abilities into..... I think that the school thinks that careers advice is important and therefore it is something that I will have”. (Alexa)

In summary, several themes emerge strongly in this section. One of these is that the large majority of the students said they would, at some stage, approach their teachers for help in times of social difficulty, indicating a confidence in being given the necessary support. In some cases this confidence was generated by specific action taken by their teachers when approached for such help. This response also paid tribute to the sound relationship between student and teacher.

In academic matters the strength and generosity of their teachers' support was underlined by the students. Without exception they were all made to feel that they were welcome to approach any member of staff for help and all felt quite confident in doing so and making the most of the opportunities offered.

However, amongst the few criticisms made one student raised the issue of the difficulty of getting attention in mixed ability lessons, where there were students who were likely to be disruptive if not watched. Another student was concerned about the lack of textbook availability, which is a serious problem for the very able student.

On the other hand, several students also paid tribute to the resources, especially the computer resources in their schools, indicating both enthusiasm for and a willingness to use modern technology in promoting their learning. An appreciation of twilight lessons by one student points to a willingness to take on new learning challenges and add breadth to his curriculum, issues which will be pursued in a later chapter. It also pays tribute to the school in offering such opportunities to its students.

Students who are very able in all areas sometimes have difficulty in deciding on a career (Shore et al., 1991) and this point was raised by two of the students.

However, in general it was too early for vocational guidance to be an issue for these students.

### **Home Support and Influence.**

Parental support and support from the home background generally have been referred to in comments on both social support and academic support for the students in their schools. Some reference to this has also been made in Chapter I on coping with negative attitudes. However, at various points in the interviews, all of the students made additional comments on support from home. Thus, to give a clear picture of overall responses on this issue, a summary of the students' comments from the above sections will be given here, with their further comments on support from the home added as appropriate.

Without exception the parents supported the students by visiting the schools for Parents' Evenings or other similar meetings, mainly intended for discussion of the students' work and progress, but also offering opportunities to discuss social issues. No problems related to home-school relationships were mentioned by any student.

Regarding support for the students specifically in the social context, the seven students who had to cope with negative responses all paid tribute to support from home, details of this being given in Chapter I. Of the eight who had no such problems five made direct reference to the helpful influence of the home background. All fifteen students, albeit one rather obliquely, indicated that, if or when in difficulty socially, they would at some point approach parents and/or an older sibling for help and advice. In the context of academic support, without exception the students made positive responses on the issue of support from home. Some made reference only to parents, but several also mentioned siblings and/or the wider family not only in terms of direct support and encouragement but also in the way they had influenced their motivation and achievement.



Six students made reference to the support and influence of parents only. Four of these were either the first born or had no siblings.

“My mum and dad are always very supportive of me ... they always encourage me in things I want to do .... but they don't pressure me”. (Margaret)

“My mum and dad - my dad especially, tries to check through my work ... things like that”. (Alan)

“My parents have always encouraged me. ... If I want help with a piece of homework they'll be able to give me help”. (Greg)

The other two students had able older siblings but neither made reference to these in terms of influencing them in any way, mentioning only their parents. For example one commented:

“I've always been interested in the same things as my Dad ... he's always helped me”. (Andrew).

Five students mentioned one or more older and very able sibling/s, as well as parents, in giving support and being a positive influence in their lives:

“There have been times when ... I felt as if whatever I do they're always going to think oh B's done this and because of what he achieved I couldn't do really that much better, so they're only going to remember what he's done. ... There was a time when I was just thinking what's the point. ... When anyone asks me (now) what I want to get for GCSEs or whatever, I always joke about it – ‘oh I'll beat my brother’. ... He did nine and got all A\*s ... I've got something to aim for and I think my parents have helped me”. (Amy)

“Parents are always there to help. ... He (her brother) did quite well and I'd like to do as well as he did”. (Sara)

“My parents are good always .. help when they can ... they won't let me like slack off ... if they think I've been going out too much with my friends rather than working then my Dad tells me. .... My brother can help often 'cause he's done the work before. ... My grandad .. often helps me”. (Gareth)

Four other students also referred to members of their wider families as well as parents as being supportive and/or influential. None of these four had an older sibling. One of them paid tribute to her whole family for their support, commenting:

“I've always been encouraged to do well, always, my whole family, my grandpa as well, they've always encouraged me to do well. If I get good results they congratulate me. My whole family is just one hundred percent with me”. (Lisa)

Two of the four mentioned a generally very able wider family as having been influential in their motivation and achievement. One comments:

“My upbringing definitely influences the way I think because I've always been encouraged by my parents to try hard at school. ... I have a wonderful role model (at home). .... My cousin is so independent ... I'd love to be like my cousin because she's got her own job and she's goes shopping in London all the time”. (Fiona)

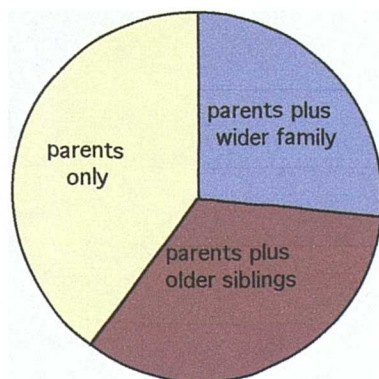


Figure 19: Support and Influence in the Home

In summary, an overview of the students responses is given in Figure 19. Several high profile issues were raised in this section, especially the unequivocal and unswerving support given to the students, both socially and academically, from their home backgrounds, to which all the students paid tribute at some stage in their responses. This support had helped them in any difficulties and had been a very

positive influence on their motivation and achievement. Strong tribute was also given to the general support offered by the schools.

Another issue which is raised here is the importance of the support and influence of the wider family. Within this a very interesting theme emerges, that of the impact of the family role model, especially the sibling rival / role model.

### **Time for Relaxation and Special Interests.**

Time to relax and have recreation or time to themselves and not to be over-pressured was referred to in the interviews in the context of social/emotional needs. Having time to practise skills both practical and intellectual, and pursue special interests came into the category of academic/curricular needs. The responses of the students on these two issues overlap and are discussed here together. Both are relevant to the issue of support given in school and by the home. Too much pressure can create stress, with all its concomitant problems (Freeman 1979), therefore allowing or even creating this is not supportive of the students either emotionally or academically.

Four students felt they did not have as much time as they would like to relax and/or time to practise skills or pursue interests. One spoke on these issues at some length, emphasising that he put this pressure on himself:

“With all the competition I have, but mostly the motivation and goals I probably set myself to excel and do the very best I can, I think that doesn't leave too much time to do what I really want to do and sometimes that can be a burden. There's a lot of pressure but, you know, the comfort I have in that is it'll pay off”. (Ian)

The other three felt pressured by a heavy work load and would have liked more time for reading, as one remarked:

“I enjoy reading but I haven't read a book since the summer holidays because I've had so much work”. (Amy)

Two other students' feelings on this issue were quite opposite to those of the above four. They said they had plenty of time for practising and pursuing their own interests, to the extent that one felt he had almost too much time commenting:

"I've definitely got plenty of time I'd say, 'cause we don't get much homework so that means we've got lots of free time. In some ways I sort of wish that we did have a bit more homework". (Greg)

The remaining nine students felt that in general they had enough time both for relaxing and for practising skills or pursuing things of special interest, although some made qualifying comments. Two of these mentioned homework as a limiting factor in having as much time as they would like to pursue their own special interests generally, for example:

"Sometimes we get lots of homework ... it has to be in quite quickly and there is a pressure there to get it done. Sometimes I've got enough time, sometimes I'm doing a lot of homework and I don't really have time at all". (Richard)

Two others mentioned that while they did not feel pressured and had time to pursue their own interests / practise skills, like the other three noted above they too would have welcomed time for more reading, with volume of homework being partly to blame for this in one case.

Of the fifteen students only two mentioned that they occasionally feel pressured to do well, in both cases by their parents:

"I think at times I get some pressure from my mum ..... my dad certainly he just wants me to do my best, whereas my mum will always want me to be the best which is different ... and at times that can be a bit detrimental 'cause I feel under pressure". (Thomas)

In summary, the students' responses are summarised in Figure 20. There is a feeling that very able students do not always have enough time to themselves

to relax and for their various interests and activities. In this study the majority of students felt they did have adequate relaxing time, but amongst these and the few who felt pressured, an interesting theme was raised where five of the students said they would like more time for reading.

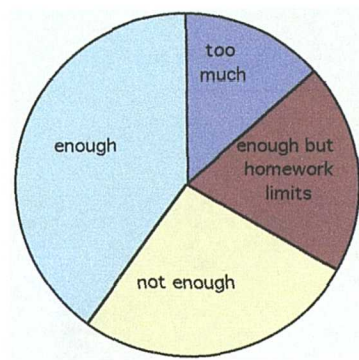


Figure 20: Time to Relax

Very able students are sometimes seen as being pressured to achieve by their parents. Only two of the students made any mention of this.

### **Responses of Parents and Teachers**

The responses of the students, their parents and teachers are summarised on Table VII (Appendix III). The comments on agreement in views are on the same basis as before and levels of agreement in views are shown on Figure 21 below. Levels of response were, again, high in all areas.

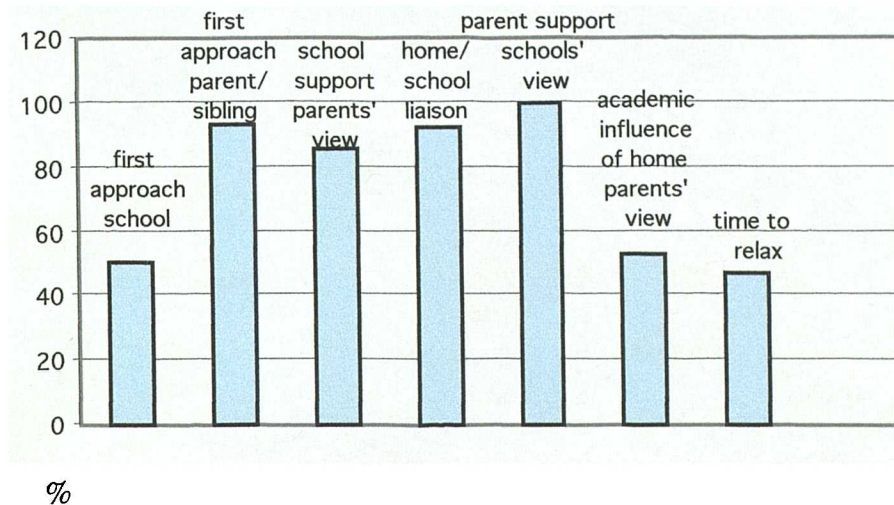


Figure 21: Levels of Agreement on Issues Relating to Support

### Support in school, home-school liaison

In relation to social support of the students, in giving personal opinions on this, fourteen of the students' parents indicated their trust in the support which would be given to the students, if or when having problems. The remaining parent was not negative, merely felt uncertain. This shows a high correlation with the responses of the students where only one, not the one whose parents were uncertain, said she would not at any stage approach a teacher for help. In their views on whom the students would approach first if they needed help in social matters, of the twelve students who said they would approach parents first, ten of their parents agreed but only four of their teachers made a definite statement to this effect. Of the other six teachers who commented, five believed the students would approach them or someone in the school at some stage, which is in accord with the students' comments. Some of these teachers gave details of the kind of support sought by and given to students, and its perceived importance for the student. For example:

“She used to come and chat to me on a daily basis about things that were happening. . . . She would report having been up very late the night before doing a certain piece of work . . . she would voice frustrations. . . . I felt that I was giving her

quite a lot of support regularly . . . there was a certain amount of reassurance that I gave her. . . I felt that she was singling me out as an adult to relate to, she needed an adult to relate to”.

In terms of academic support the parents were equally happy with that offered by the schools and all felt that home-school liaison and communication were good, this correlating well with the views of the students. In only one case did parents, although acknowledging facilities for discussion existed, feel they would like a little more in the way of structured meetings with teachers. The parents were not only satisfied with the general level of support for the students, but six also referred positively to the schools’ resources although only one of the students concerned made similar comments. Two, however, were not happy with the computer resources, one with the availability of these, although the student had mentioned her appreciation of the access to the Internet offered by her school. This refers again to an issue mentioned earlier, that of the interest in use of modern technology in education. One parent’s comment on resources raised an issue which is high profile in the next chapter, that of the importance of the teacher, commenting:

“This view that you put computers into every school therefore things are better – I do not subscribe to that view at all, it is what you do with them that matters. . . I would say the teachers, . . the actual human resources are the most important”.

### **Vocational guidance**

This did not emerge as an important issue, mainly because at the stage of the interviews careers advice programmes were mostly only just starting for these students. The level of parent responses and agreement of views on whether or not the students’ knew the careers they wished to pursue was high. The teachers were asked about the systems in their schools and whether the students had at that stage approached anyone in school for advice. Only one student had done so and this was for help with work experience rather than advice about a career area.

### **Home support and influence**

The teachers were asked to comment on support from home. The total and unfailing support given to the students by their parents, as commented upon by the students, was endorsed in the comments of all of the teachers. They also agreed totally with the fourteen parents and twelve students who felt that home-school liaison was good or very good, and so this again emerges as a dominant theme. Responses and levels of agreement of views on this issue should be reliable, since comments made are based on actual experiences of parental support as indicated in discussions during Parents' Evenings and other such instances of direct communication.

The teachers were not consulted on the influence of the wider family on the lives and especially the achievements of the students. On first examination this is not an area of wide agreement between parents and students. None of the parents of the students who said they were the main influence in this agreed. However, of the nine students who mentioned the influence of siblings and the wider family, eight of their parents did agree, with some indication that these were role models / rivals. For example:

“He wants to do better in his GCSE's than his (very able) brother and sister – and he will do”.

### **Time for relaxation and special interests**

There was a full set of responses from parents and teachers on the question of the students having time to relax and pursue their own interests, but levels of agreement of views were low. Nobody agreed with the two students who said they had too much time. Of the four students who said they did not have as much time as they would like to themselves, while all of their parents agreed, none of their teachers did. This is an interesting difference in perceptions. However, this is explained at



least partly by the fact that the teachers all made their comments mainly in relation to time in school, whereas the parents took the more general view. The parents of one student commented on his feeling pressured and his lack of free time as follows:

“There was one point when he did reach a burn-out stage . . . where he almost after a half term incredibly didn’t want to go back to school. . . . I think he felt everyone had these pressures on him that he had to be the top. We tried to really change that to say . . . ‘we don’t care if you’re number one or not, all we want you to do is the best that you can do’. . . . I hate it when they give him homework over half term or over a holiday time, because my feeling is that time is to recoup. The school year’s long . . . he leaves home at 7.15 in the morning and gets home at 5.30 at night and for a kid that age that is exhausting, and then he comes home and starts the hours of homework, and if they would .. say ‘OK, half term, you have nothing to do – go home, sleep, eat, play and come back ready to work again’. That would be fine with us”.

Of the other eight students who said they did have enough time, seven of their parents and all of their teachers also said they thought this was so, several teachers making the point that the students organised their time to allow for this. This was also said about two of the students whose teachers, contrary to the students, believed they had time to relax and for their interests, and so this new theme of being well organised emerges here, one teacher commenting:

“Doesn’t seem to be a problem, she seems to be able to find time, she seems to be able to take on things. . . . In school she always seems to be on top of things. . . . She always seems to be in control and she’s very, very well organised.”

This is an issue which will be discussed again in the chapter where the students’ organisation of their private study time is considered.

In summary, insofar as the parents’ and teachers’ views correspond with those of the students, the level of agreement is quite high, especially on those issues where the

views given by the two groups were on soundly based opinions rather than speculative.

The theme which emerges very strongly here, from the responses of the parents and teachers alike, is that of a mutual trust and confidence in the support given to the students in all aspects of home and school life. This complements the comments made by both on the related topic of good home – school liaison and closely reflects the students' comments on these issues.

Within the area of the schools' academic support, the parents, just as the students, indicated the value they placed on the provision and use of modern technological equipment, most notably computers, in the schools.

The theme of the in-family role model or rival emerged quite strongly again here, reflecting the students' comments discussed earlier. Agreement between parents and students on this issue was quite high.

Commenting on time to relax, the enormous pressures that can be exerted by workloads and the need to achieve were highlighted by the parents of one student. This reflects a theme which emerged in an earlier section of this chapter. On the same topic the strong powers of organisation of some students were mentioned as a reason for their not being over-pressured. This theme re-emerges in the chapter on Intellectual Independence and will be discussed further there.

## CHAPTER X

### A GOOD GENERAL EDUCATION AND CHALLENGE

#### A GOOD GENERAL EDUCATION

As noted in the literature section a good general education in terms of a balanced curriculum, with no area of special ability pursued at the expense of others, is seen a need for gifted or very able children (DES, 1977). All the schools which took part in the research offered their students a balanced curriculum and in their choices for the GCSE examinations the students had a selection of subjects which covered all the major curricular areas.

The importance to the students of having a balance in their curricula was explored by asking them various questions on giving equal attention to all their subjects. The question was inadvertently omitted for one student but she was giving maximum effort to all subjects, so by strong implication suggested it was important to her not to neglect any. Of the remaining fourteen, with the exception only of a student who felt some subjects were marginally worth more attention than others, but not to the point of neglecting any, all felt it was important for them not to neglect any area of their *current* studies. However, four had given less attention in past years to subjects they disliked, found difficult or they viewed as not having an importance for them, because they were not going to take them in the exams:

“ Last year I had RE and I wasn't interested in that at all, so perhaps didn't give quite as much (effort) to that ... because I knew I didn't want to do it (this year)”.

(Sara)

Interesting reasons were given for keeping a balance in terms of not neglecting any subject area. Most of these were of a very practical nature, with four students making a very direct reference to the need to do well in results of tests or exams, most

notably GCSE, in all subjects. Another said she could not afford to neglect anything because she had not yet decided on a career. One student offered a different reason from anyone else, albeit still a pragmatic one, for not neglecting anything:

“There are things you can learn in every subject that will be useful to you as a person rather than just as a subject”. (Richard)

In summary the views of the students on the importance of a balance in their current curricula are summarised in Figure 22. The great majority of the students viewed balance in their curricula as important and most gave very pragmatic reasons for this. None was neglecting any area, even the one student who was slightly ambivalent about equal importance of subjects, was still making an effort in all areas.

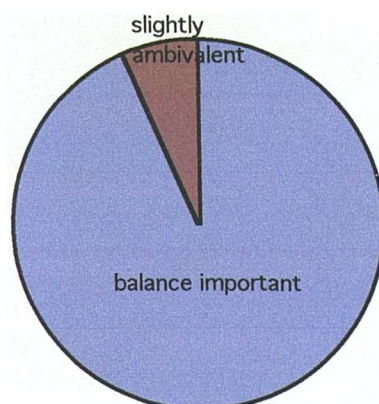


Figure 22: Students' View of the Importance of Balance in Their Curricula

## CHALLENGE

To enable them to reach their full potential and to avoid boredom and its many undesirable consequences such as underachievement, very able pupils must be given

adequate challenge, this being, arguably, their greatest academic / curricular need, not only intellectually but also across the whole spectrum of their ability. The type of challenge and the way in which it is delivered is also crucial, for example, much repetition of tasks and concepts understood and mastered can be soul destroying for them (Carey, 1995) and does not offer *appropriate* challenge for the very able (Eyre, 1997a).

Within this section various kinds of challenges within the schools are discussed and the challenges offered by contacts with others of similar ability and interests. Extra-curricular challenges in and out of school and the opportunities offered through these to discover unrecognised abilities are also considered. The students' attitude to failure is also discussed and the influence this can have on their response to new and difficult challenges.

### **Challenge in the Classroom**

In asking the students whether or not they gave equal attention to all their subjects and equal interest and concentration in all lessons, the overall objective was to discover the extent to which variations in either were because of inadequate challenge with consequent boredom. Most especially it was to discover if the students felt they were being challenged enough generally.

Only three students felt, without reservation, that they were being given adequate challenge throughout the curriculum. All three at the time were giving equal effort and attention to their subjects, although this had not been so in earlier years. Two commented as follows:

“I am doing work now that it is difficult it is challenging, it's - you have to think about it. . . . I've always had a challenge in this direction, . . I've always had to work at it in my subjects to do well”. (Richard)

“You never sit there and think . . . ‘this is really easy’ ”. (Sara)

Two students felt that they were not challenged enough in the past, and although this was no longer the case, both had times when they were bored. The quoted comments on these issues start with the student's responses to the question as to whether or not he felt he was being sufficiently challenged:

"Yes, ... I think I am now. Maybe not so much in the early years when we weren't so much in ability groups, only for a few lessons ... but now we've been put into GCSE ability groups. .... I try to put in as much interest and effort as I can, but if something doesn't interest me then I can't concentrate ... if something is boring me I can't concentrate ... (for example) if a teacher drones on about something". (Andrew)

Two students felt they were mostly challenged enough and gave equal attention to their subjects, mentioning only occasional periods of boredom, when concentration lapsed slightly:

"I'd say I listen ... to everything that's said and concentrate. Depends what the subject is really - if it's a boring subject I might sort of daydream ... drift a bit. If it's a teacher that explains things just sitting there and dragging on in the same way, hour on hour, it can be boring". (Alan)

"If I'm enjoying a lesson then I'm interested, concentrate very hard, but if it's ... a boring lesson where nobody's stretched then ... my concentration lapses a little. Normally every lesson's fairly good. .... There's always the chance to extend what you have been doing". (Christopher)

Four students felt they were having enough challenge either in all or most subjects but they made subsequent comments which contradicted this. In all cases their efforts varied across their subjects, all but one mentioning boredom as a reason for this. Starting with responses on whether or not they were being challenged enough they commented:

"Yes, probably. ... Sometimes when I understand everything I think 'I'd prefer to be doing something else, I understand this'. .... In maths you know, I get a bit bored with it because sometimes when I'm doing an exercise, after about two

questions ... I know .... what's going on and then I get a bit bored later on .... if we have to do twenty questions or something (all the same)". (Margaret)

"In most, ... certainly in the ones which are done in sets then obviously you are. In others which aren't, like English, my teacher often gives me extra work, ... and the format which we do the work in is often changed, like I'd write an essay rather than different pieces. .... Some students probably concentrate a lot more in the lessons than I do, I'm quite talkative ... but I end up getting the work done. .... Maybe I don't always need to concentrate if the work's already covered". (Gareth)

"I don't like being pushed a lot, I like doing things in my own time. . . . I've quite enough to do now, don't really want any more. .... I get bored with things very quickly .... if we don't move on through a subject really fast. ... I analyse things really quickly, so I can't be bothered if they keep going on and on about it". (Naomi)

"Overall I think I am. .... I could be more in a few things - I don't know how much more I could be doing. ... I could be given harder work in most things - I could be worked harder". (Fiona)

Asked if there was any extra work provided that she could do she said there was but this was not something she would ask for because:

"The work that's extra tends to be the same thing only a bit more in detail". (Fiona).

The remaining four of the fifteen students felt they were not being challenged enough. Two of these said that their efforts fluctuated depending on the circumstances, and mentioned experiencing some boredom, one commenting:

"If I enjoy a subject or if I have a teacher which I particularly like then ... the amount of work or the effort I put in does rise. .... I am interested in new concepts in maths but I don't like doing them over and over again, however good it is for me, I can find that quite irritating. .... If the teacher isn't controlling the class and therefore it's very difficult to learn anyway or if we're doing something which is extremely repetitive ... that bores me, and occasionally teachers go at too slow a pace or don't teach in a way that makes it interesting ... sometimes it's too fast. .... I

haven't really really been challenged .. for a long time and in some ways I don't particularly want to be". (Alexa)

The other two students felt they gave equal effort and attention to all their subjects but added qualifying comments, for example:

"I would say my interest and concentration would be directly related to .. if I like the teacher, ... how challenging the lessons are, things like that. . . In some subjects I'd say I am stretched, in others not. . . I spent most of Year 9 just doing things I had done before". (Greg)

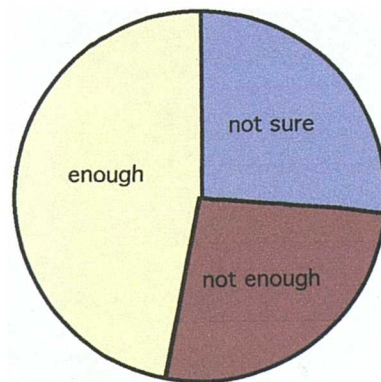


Figure 23: Level of Challenge

In summary, Figure 23 gives an overall view of the students' responses. Considering first the issue which is the focus of this section, there was no student who felt that he or she suffered from a complete and persistent lack of challenge. However, there were indications that there was not *appropriate* challenge in all areas all the time with quite characteristic reactions to this.

Seven of the students felt they were being generally sufficiently challenged. Of the four of them who believed they were being challenged but had reservations, the reservations were minor, principally a matter of occasional boredom. One of these



students made the interesting point that normally the lessons were fairly good with opportunities for extension work.

At the other end of the spectrum, there were four who felt they were not being given sufficient challenge. However, none of these, including the student who said she had never been “really really challenged”, suggested this was a persistent or all pervading problem. The same was true of the four students who were rather ambivalent on this issue, but whose comments suggested that they were *not* being given adequate challenge. One of these, however, indicated that his English teacher did give him more challenging work when he needed this. There were, therefore, two students who indicated that their teachers were recognising the need for and providing extension work for their very able students.

Within the broader topic of challenge boredom was an issue, some degree of this being mentioned by nine students. Interesting reasons were given for this such as unnecessary repetition of work already well understood, too slow a pace, or when nobody was being stretched. The issues of repetition of work and pace are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The important role of the teacher and teaching styles emerges strongly as a theme being mentioned directly by six students. Four of these commented on being bored if the teacher was “dragging on” or “drones on” or could not control the class and the work was repetitive. The other two referred to the general importance of the teacher in their response to the subject concerned. Four other students made references to teaching styles rather than to the teacher, commenting on repetition and lessons where students were not stretched enough.

### **Contacts with Others of Similar Ability and Interests**

There is evidence to show that able students enjoy having contact with those of similar ability and interests, because of the intellectual as well as the social benefits

accruing from this (Wallace, 1983a; Leyden, 1985). Contact with those of similar ability, in particular, can provide a welcome intellectual challenge and stimulation .

In Year 10 the students in all five schools were in (high) ability or option groups for all or most of their subjects, although this was not so in earlier years. Where there was only one option group in a subject then the students could not be set by ability, but at least everyone had chosen to take the subject for their GCSE examinations and so these groups should have consisted of people who, if not necessarily all of high ability in that subject, at least had a common interest in it. In extra-curricular activities in school this was also the case, where those taking part, for example, in a sporting or musical activity, would be with others of comparable interest and some were likely also be of comparable ability in that activity.

Three of the fifteen students said they would have liked just a little more contact in lessons in school with others of comparable ability, as, for example, could have been achieved by having more subjects where the students were in ability groups. Otherwise they were quite happy with the amount of contact they had with others of similar interests and ability in and out of school. One student was quoted earlier on some of the problems of being in mixed ability groups. On wanting more ability grouping she said:

“I think it might be quite good to have .... perhaps the PSE lesson, put that into more ability related (groups)”. (Amy)

One student, by contrast, felt that in school the level of such contacts was:

“I'd say possibly more than I would like”. (Alan)

The remaining eleven students were generally happy with the amount of contact they had with others of similar interests and ability both in and out of school. One made the point that while he did appreciate the extra challenge of being in high ability groups, when it came to contacts with those who have similar interests the level of ability of such friends was not important to him:

“Some people who're interested in the same things as you - it doesn't really matter if they're of the same ability or not, if you're interested in the same things as them .. you can do things together. It doesn't really bother me if they're the same ability or not”.(Andrew)

On the advantages of being in high ability groups three students commented:

“I think being with people of the same ability ... I like it. ... Recently we've done talks in English and similar things and we had debates on various subjects, which we gave a talk on and tried to put across our opinion on the matter and we had big discussions and that was very good as it ... makes you explore the concept”.(Ian)

“Academically ... I think it's a lot easier to get what you need from the teacher if they're teaching everybody that wants the same sort of teaching and has the same sort of ability. .... Somebody will say something and you will think 'hey, yes I've been thinking that' or you will think 'hey, I hadn't thought of that', .... I enjoy that .. mental stimulation I think it's good”. (Lisa)

“From being in ability sets you can get work that's specifically for people of that ability. ... You tend to get less people who mess about because people who are of a high ability generally work well and don't mess about. If you're in a mixed group then you're going to be given work that covers a whole range of people and the teacher will have to spend more time seeing different people with different work. .... In the top group everyone's just given hard work”. (Richard)

All the students valued these contacts and regarded them as important, although one, having made this clear, when asked if they mattered to her replied:

“I could live without being with people with the same kind of ability as me ... I've got friends who aren't of the same ability as me and .. I get on with those fine, but .... I like being with people of the same interests because then .. you've got something in common”. (Margaret)

In summary, an overview of the students responses is shown in Figure 24. The main issue here is that most of the students felt they had as much contact with others of similar ability and interests as they wanted or needed. A theme emerges

within this where two students mentioned that similar interests were more important to them in their contacts than comparable ability.

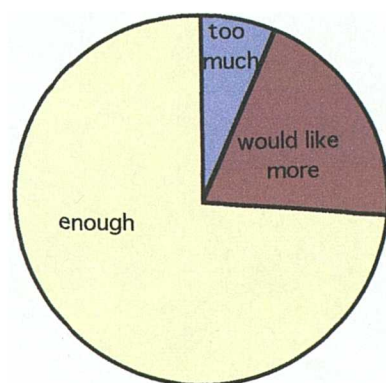


Figure 24: Contacts with Those of Similar Ability and Interests

On the other hand, an opposite view and so a different theme is raised by three other students who would have liked a little more contact in school with others of high ability, for example, by having more subjects set in groups by ability. They referred to the intellectual benefits this would have for them, two in terms of the added mental challenge and stimulation. One student, quoted in Chapter IX as well as in this chapter, commented in some detail on the difficulties of having lessons in groups of mixed ability. This all raises the whole issue of the need for ability grouping for these very able students which will be discussed later.

### **Opportunities to Discover New Interests and Abilities not Previously Recognised**

High ability in a particular area can remain undiscovered, sometimes until late adulthood, because neither the person concerned nor anyone else, parent, teacher etc., has recognised the existence of this ability. The importance of providing opportunity for discovering unrecognised gifts, talents and interests is now appreciated and is

being strongly promoted as a means whereby schools can identify and make provision for those with such abilities (Freeman, 1998; Wallace, 2000a). Extra-curricular activities are amongst the many ways in which opportunities and new challenges, beyond those in the regular curriculum, can be offered to students.

All five schools in the research offered a wide range of extra-curricular activities. In each case this included a period of time varying from one day to one week in which the students were offered the opportunity to take part in various outdoor activities. Many of these were activities which they had never previously experienced, as were many of the in-school extra-curricular activities offered, including opportunities to take examination courses in new subjects.

The question asked on this issue specifically referred to the discovery of abilities and talents hitherto unrecognised. However, the students' responses tended to refer to the appeal of certain new activities and the stimulation of interest and enjoyment before, or in place of, mention of any ability or talent in the area concerned.

All fifteen students took part in varying degrees in the extra-curricular activities / opportunities offered by their schools, but only four mentioned having discovered areas of new interest or ability through these. In each case the new interest developed during outdoor activities sessions. One student discovered he very much enjoyed snowboarding and was looking forward to the opportunity, promised by the school, to do more of this. Another enjoyed the mountain bike ride on her course. She found this challenging and would have liked to do this again but she also had been introduced to debating by her school in which she participated with enthusiasm. The other two commented on their experiences, one also referring to the challenge involved:

"I really really enjoyed that week ... and I found out that I really liked canoeing. .. I mean we did canoeing and kayaking one day and I didn't like the kayaking so much . . . but in the canoe . . . I really enjoyed that, and you know I

found that quite challenging in some ways. . . . Then we went gorge walking, ... we had to do a lot of abseiling and climbing and things like that within the gorge walking, it was really wet .. but ... I really really enjoyed that too..... I found out a lot of things that I liked”. (Margaret)

“In the second year .... we spent a week .. and we just played all different sorts of sports. ... Badminton, which I had never played before, it was good. ... We've just started badminton club”. (Thomas)

Two students had benefited from being introduced to new curriculum subjects. In his previous school one of these was introduced to cricket and rugby. He not only became very interested in these sports but found he had a talent for them, and had continued to play both. In the other student's school media studies was introduced as a GCSE optional subject. It was not a part of the curriculum prior to this and it became one of his favourite subjects.

Two other students mentioned having their interest in existing curriculum subjects enhanced by new activities, one from within the curriculum the other from an extra-curricular activity run by the school the latter commenting:

“It was definitely an opportunity, ... something that really got me interested in history, which is probably one of the reasons why I did it (as a GCSE subject)”  
(Ian)

All the students also participated in various out-of-school activities to a greater or lesser extent, as noted in Chapter VII. Some of them led very busy lives in this respect, taking advantage of opportunities in the community, there being considerable emphasis on physical activities. However, only one remembered any of these opportunities leading to the sudden discovery of an ability or talent previously unrecognised or of a new and absorbing interest. This student, through using local sports facilities, had discovered relatively recently that she had a considerable talent for swimming. The other students did have many and various talents, some of them outstanding, but these appear to have been recognised mostly from quite an early stage and developed over a period of years.

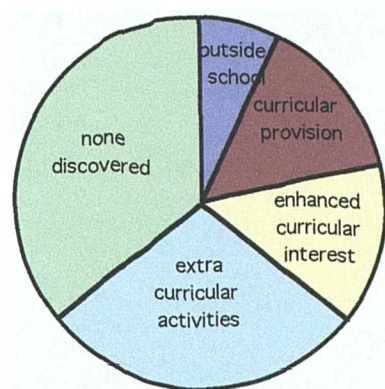


Figure 25: Discovery of New Abilities and Interests

In summary , an overview of the students' responses is given in Figure 25. All of the students were aware of and had, in varying degrees, taken advantage of opportunities offered to them both in and out of school. Directly arising from their use of these opportunities, seven of the students had discovered areas of new interest, enjoyment or ability, two students making reference to the challenges offered by their new experiences.

An interesting theme to emerge was the slightly unexpected mention of what some students regarded as opportunities offered through the regular curriculum, rather than by extra-curricular activities. Reference was also made by two students to enhanced interest in curricular subjects through the introduction of a new topic and a subject related trip. There are implications here for the curricular related opportunities offered to very able students and these will be discussed in more detail later.

### **Attitude to / coping with failure**

One of the characteristics of very able children is a fear of failure and one of their needs is therefore to learn to cope with this (Leyden, 1985). Where the failure is of a rather public nature as in an examination, the feeling of embarrassment which

can accompany this could result in a student's reluctance to try new and very difficult learning challenges or take intellectual risks. Fear of failure might also have an impact upon the response to difficulty in understanding new concepts, in which case the student may resort to rote learning of material rather than have to seek extra help or further explanation. The students' responses to these two closely related issues are considered here together.

Eleven of the fifteen students indicated that they had never experienced a failure of a public nature, such as failing an examination. Four of these said they did not fear such a failure and would not be embarrassed by this, although one student made a qualifying comment in connection with times when he had not done as well as he might:

“Once or twice I haven't done that well in exams, but I mean, I'm more worried about the reaction of my parents than the reaction of my friends”. (Thomas)

Another made the very interesting observation that having the chance to make mistakes helps you to learn to handle failure, commenting:

“If you get something right first time . . . then it's not going to sink in as much as if you perhaps made a mistake, you remember it a lot more if you have to think about it. . . . I think it's very important to learn from your mistakes and not from someone just feeding it to you. I think it's important to be allowed to make mistakes, . . we might as well make our mistakes now rather than later”. (Amy)

Another six of these eleven students although not having a fear of failure as such, nevertheless said they definitely would feel some degree of embarrassment. Four of these mentioned specific fears in this connection, one of the anticipated negative reaction of peers, two of failure in GCSE exams:

“Yes I do (feel frightened of failing something). Sometimes when I think about GCSEs I think ... ‘oh what am I going to do when I get in there... into the exam hall’. ... I would feel frightened if I did fail, you know, because it would kind of change what I was going to do later on”. (Margaret)



“I am frightened of failing when it comes to GCSEs, ... but I think everybody is anyway”. (Lisa)

This student added an interesting comment about failing:

“You can't do well in everything and ... I do think it's good that you have the odd disappointment ... and slip up - it just makes you more human really”. (Lisa)

One student knew he would certainly be embarrassed by this and had in the past been frightened of failure and consequently of taking intellectual risks. On avoiding difficult tasks or taking intellectual risks because of this fear he comments:

“Sometimes I've probably done that. That's another thing art again has helped me with ... because we've been encouraged to take risks and hopefully that ... has probed into other subjects which means I'd (now) be willing to take risks”. (Ian)

The remaining four students had experienced a fairly public failure as in an exam, or making some sort of major mistake of which everyone was aware. Two of these feared failure or making such mistakes in general to a degree, but not to the extent of inhibiting their willingness to undertake challenging cognitive tasks. One was embarrassed by it:

“If I do make a mistake then it does embarrass me, because people expect you not to make mistakes. If you make mistakes then they'll take the mickey out of you for the rest of your life, they'll never let you forget it”. (Richard)

The other two of the four students did not fear failure in general, although one found it an embarrassment. The other did not find failure or poorer than expected results embarrassing, but had a specific fear of failing GCSE in a particular subject where her parents were likely to make comparisons with friends and relations. As a result, the student was not prepared to risk taking the exam in this particular subject.

In summary, Figure 26 gives an overview of the students' responses. An important general theme to emerge is that, whatever their fears or worries, only one of

the students would have feared failure to the point of being unwilling to meet a challenge, and this affected her in only one very specific subject.

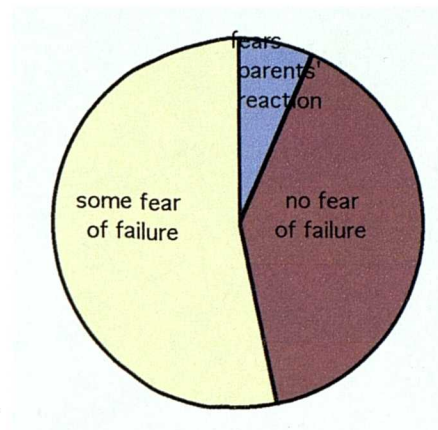


Figure 26: Fear of Failure

Eight of the students indicated that they had some fear of failure, either specific or general. Within this the theme of negative peer reaction re-emerged, two mentioning this as the basis of their fear. Two other students mentioned failure in the GCSE examinations as a reason for their fear, highlighting the importance attached to and pressures exerted by these examinations.

One very interesting and unexpected theme emerges from the comments of two students who made reference to actual benefits they saw accruing from failure. One remarked that failure made you more human and the other that essentially you need to be *allowed* to fail to learn to cope with this. These seemed remarkably far-sighted and objective attitudes.

## Responses to Challenges

Whether in response to failing in some learning task or problem solving, or in an exam, or when tackling tasks and concepts which they find very difficult to understand, without exception the students said they would see the failure or difficulty as a very definite challenge. They would all want to persevere, one with qualification, until they discovered what mistakes they had made and would try a variety of strategies to promote their understanding in areas of difficult learning.

All fifteen of the students would be quite prepared to ask for help but while thirteen of them would want to try to resolve their problems independently before seeking help, two would ask for help as a first resort. All students mentioned seeking help from their teachers, one with slight hesitation. Two others said they would, if necessary, seek help from their parents as well as from their teachers. Six students also mentioned approaching fellow students, three of these saying that when it comes to finding new topics difficult to understand they would talk to their friends before approaching their teachers:

“I talk to other people who I'm sitting by ... and see if they understand, because I find if I don't understand something I learn it better off them than by asking the teacher. ... You remember it more ... if it's explained .. in their words, how they understand it”. (Christopher)

If, in spite of all help and efforts, there was still a failure to understand a difficult topic or concept, eight students said they would never resort to rote learning of the material. One of these emphasised the importance to her of understanding in the retention of what she has learnt:

“The easiest way I find of remembering ... is by understanding and once I have learnt it like that it is unlikely I will forget it. .... It's not a general practice in schools to learn things by rote unless it's to do with a formula which you just have to know, and I think, ... ‘if I understand the formula, that's the only way it really will stick’”. (Alexa)

The other seven students memorised by rote only as a very last resort, when all efforts and help had failed to bring understanding. One student said when he did this he hoped understanding would come later and four mentioned that they had experienced this:

“I find that when I do learn ... off by heart and when I do apply it in an exam then it does all of a sudden make some sort of sense”. (Lisa)

In summary, an important theme to emerge from the students’ responses is that in accepting the challenges of failure or a new and difficult task, at some stage they would all be prepared to ask for help if necessary.

In tackling areas of difficult learning only two students said they would first seek help from their teachers, but only for initial guidance. The remaining students all wanted to be quite independent to start with, only seeking help if absolutely necessary. This raises the high profile issue of intellectual independence which is the focus of the next chapter.

A very interesting theme is raised within this wider issue in that, while all would have been prepared to ask their teachers for help, they would not necessarily have approached them first. Six students said they would ask their fellow students for help, three of these prior to approaching their teachers. This suggests a trust in and good rapport with their peers. It also runs contrary to any idea that the very able might not want to admit to having difficulty in understanding, especially to fellow students.

In relation to rote learning, if all else failed to bring understanding, of those eight students who would never resort to this, one mentioned her absolute need to *understand* in remembering what she had learnt. The remaining students said they would rote learn if really driven to it by urgency to learn the material but five mentioned having had the interesting experience of doing this and finding understanding came later, with the need to apply the learning. This raises the

question as to whether or not rote learning, contrary to current theory, is an acceptable strategy in such circumstances.

### **Responses of Parents and Teachers**

The responses of both these groups, together with those of the students, are summarised on Table X (Appendix III). The comments on agreement of views are on the same basis as before.

#### **A good general education**

On the question of whether or not it was important to give equal attention to all areas of the curriculum and not to neglect any subject, the parents were asked for their own views rather than how they thought the students felt about this. The majority of those who felt able to respond believed that it was necessary to keep a balance in this respect with only two, while not suggesting any area should be neglected, disagreed with the students concerned that an equal effort in everything was important. Levels of agreement in terms of being like-minded were therefore quite good.

#### **Challenge in the classroom**

While this section looks at all kinds of challenge, that given to the students in the classroom is at the heart of the discussion, together with the boredom which may result from such challenge being inadequate. Parents and teachers were asked whether or not, in their view, the students were being challenged enough. Again here they were not asked to speculate on what the students' views on this might be. The level of responses was good, with all of the parents and most of the teachers commenting. The level of agreement of views between parents and students was greater than that with their teachers which was quite low. For only five students did

all opinions agree, but of the seven students who felt they did in general have enough challenge, five of their parents but only three of their teachers agreed. For three of the four who said they did not have enough challenge three of their parents agreed. For one of the latter students the teacher's comment was very interesting. When asked if he thought the student was challenged enough he replied:

“If he's not, he challenges sufficiently 'til he is. He takes the initiative, very strongly. If you aren't challenging him enough he'll make sure you do one way or the other. He was always one I had to watch for, that I had .. certain activities up my sleeve, so that I could keep him on board”.

There was no clear pattern of disagreement in the views on challenge but there were two cases where neither teacher nor parents agreed with the views of the students. The reasons for the divergence in views of the parents and students, compared with that of their teachers, suggests that the parents have a more realistic view of whether or not the students could cope with more challenge. This is, perhaps, born out of having first hand experience of the amount of time spent at home coping with the homework load.

On the issue of boredom, the parents and teachers were asked whether or not they thought the students were ever bored in lessons. The level of responses was very low, both parents and teachers of only two students commenting, and in both cases fully agreeing with the students. Three other parents and one other teacher gave views, only one of these parents disagreeing with the student. In agreeing with one of the students a parent commented:

“He has his ups and downs on certain things, if its been a boring part he won't have given his full (effort) 'cause he'll say 'well it's boring at the minute'. You'll know as it gets a bit more interesting he'll do well. . . . He can get bored easily”.

The apparent levels of agreement in views on boredom, therefore, seem quite high in that of the six students for whom there were other responses there was agreement in five cases. However, with so few feeling able to comment on the

students' feelings the correspondence in views cannot be regarded as significant. The low response of the teachers especially is not so surprising, since the students would be unlikely to tell their teachers if they were feeling bored. They would, possibly, as in the case quoted, be more likely to communicate this to their parents. However, as noted in the earlier section on the students' responses, boredom was not a major and persistent problem for any of the students and therefore it probably was not an issue they felt they needed to discuss seriously with anyone.

### **Contacts with others of comparable ability and interests**

On the issue of the students' contacts with those of similar interests and ability, the parents were asked if *they* thought there were enough of these kinds of contacts and were they important for the students. The teachers were asked what facilities for these existed in the schools and all indicated that there were opportunities for both kinds of contacts. They were also asked if they believed these contacts were important for the students.

There was a high level of responses from the parents and generally a high level of agreement with the comments of the students. Parents of nine of the eleven students who said these contacts were enough generally agreed with them. However, the picture is a little more complex than this, with three of those parents indicating that, while there were enough contacts with those of comparable ability, they felt that the students would benefit from more contacts with those of similar interests or what some regarded as contacts of a social nature. This raises the interesting theme of parents having a concern for both aspects of the students' lives, that is in their interest and ability contacts, one parent commenting:

“She’s meeting new people now of similar ability and I think she’s finding that interesting, just talking to them and getting to know them and maybe discussing work. . . . . We’re moving into a phase now where they are very definitely focused on the GCSE course and passing exams – which is fine .. you pass the exams you’ve

got some currency. .. To relieve the pressure it might be quite nice to think of some other ways of giving the bright kids a break .. encouraging drama or debates or something less pressurised, a bit more fun. . . . (with) interest groups of people”.

The parents of two of the three students who said they would like more of such contacts also agreed, both believing the students needed more contacts with those of similar ability, raising again the theme referred to in the parallel section on student responses. These were students who had lots of contacts with those of similar interests so the parents were not over-emphasising the academic contacts.

There was a good level of response and total agreement in comments on the importance or value of such contacts to the students, some of the parents and teachers making interesting observations on this. One teacher commenting on the importance of ability contacts to the student said:

“ I think he welcomes competition and I think he looks to measure himself against others”.

### **Opportunities to discover abilities and interests not previously recognised**

Parents and teachers were not asked to comment on the students’ experiences arising from the opportunities, provided by the schools, to discover hitherto unrecognised areas of ability and new interests. They were asked only for their views on the level of provision of these by the schools. All of the teachers felt that in general there were plenty of such opportunities in their schools.

A large majority of the parents thought that what the schools offered in this respect was at least adequate and some of their comments were very positive. Four of the parents of the seven students who mentioned having discovered new interests were also aware of this and some indicated the importance they attached to opportunities being provided for the students.



### **Attitude to / coping with failure**

On the issue of fear of failure the levels of response of both parents and teachers was low. In only two cases did both comment about the students. However, there was some response for eleven of the students. In only two of the eight cases where the students said they had some fear of this was there an awareness of this by the other groups. However, there was agreement from either/or parents and teachers for four of those who said they had no fear of failure.

On this issue, since none of the students had an overwhelming and disabling fear of failure, it seems unlikely that they would voice their relatively minor fears to either their parents or teachers, especially since some of them saw those fears, such as failing in their GCSE exams, as nothing unusual. Therefore, any lack of awareness of this within the other groups or an inability to comment is not significant.

However, on the closely related issue of whether or not the students would be embarrassed or in any way upset by a major failure there was better response and levels of agreement. There was full agreement in views for eight of the nine students who said they would have such a reaction. Of the six students who said they would not be upset in any way in two cases there was agreement in the parents' and teachers' views, so that agreement generally was quite good. Again this is not an issue which the students would necessarily have discussed with others, since their upset would in no case be so great as to inhibit them in their approach to their work. The parents' and teachers' views were mainly based on opinion and some of them said it was hard to judge since they had not known of this happening to the student concerned. Referring to whether or not the student would be embarrassed if she had a major failure, as in an exam, one teacher commented:

“I’m not certain we’ve faced that yet,. . I think it would affect her, but I don’t think she would show it, I think she would be in control, but I think it would . . affect her resolve to make certain that didn’t happen again”.

In general, however, their views reflected those of the students in that in no case was it suggested that embarrassment or upset would be intellectually disabling.

### **Responses to challenges**

Only the teachers were asked whether or not the students, in approaching a difficult problem or when having difficulty in understanding, would want to tackle it on their own first or their reaction would be to seek help first. It was felt that the parents would be unlikely to have knowledge of how the students would react to this in the classroom.

Some teachers did not give an opinion on this issue, since they had never taught the students concerned. Those few teachers who felt able to comment, like the students, said that at some stage the students would approach them for help, if having real difficulty. This issue is closely related to intellectual independence which is the focus of the next chapter, where the majority of the teachers said they felt their students would, at some stage, approach them for help if they needed it in tackling new learning. It seems logical to assume that this would also apply where they were having difficulty in understanding something.

The response on whether or not the students might resort to rote learning of material not understood was also not very high and only three teachers agreed with the students' comments. On this issue the students' would be unlikely to indicate that they would use such strategies in their learning, in all probability knowing it was a method not encouraged by their teachers.

In summary the general levels of agreement of views and responses were quite mixed in this section, with lowest levels of both from teachers and parents being mostly where the students were unlikely to have discussed the issues concerned, or, as

before, where views were based more on speculation than observation or experience. Levels of agreement of views on the main issues are shown in Figure 27.

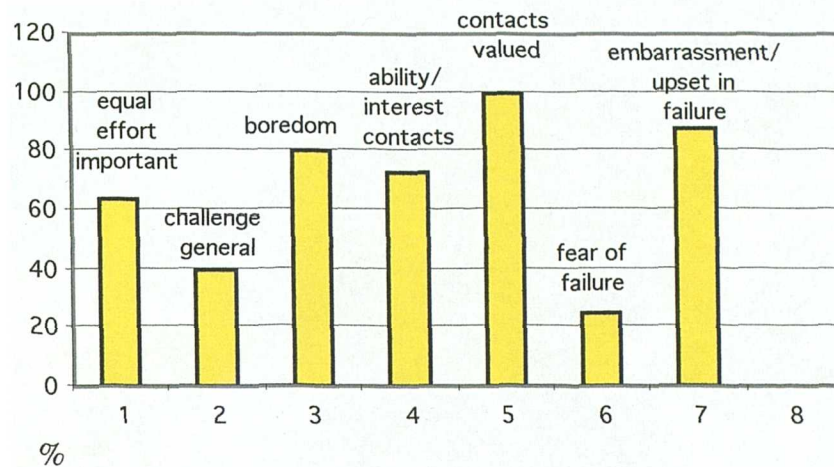


Figure 27: Levels of Agreement on Issues Relating to Challenge

The picture to emerge on the main issues of this chapter is that lack of challenge, boredom and an inhibiting fear of failure were not regarded as major problems by those parents and teachers who did comment. This reflected closely the students' responses.

Within these issues several themes emerged. Where some parents and students felt the students had enough challenge their teachers, as indicated, disagreed. This would add weight to the comment made by the student quoted in the first chapter, to the effect that teachers seemed to think it was easy for very able students to do the work quickly and well, when, in fact, they had to put in the time and effort just like everyone else. Again in connection with challenge, one teacher raised the interesting theme of the student who, if not challenged enough, would push until he was. This teacher was very aware of the need to provide extra or extension work of a suitable kind, this being very much at the heart of the issue of challenge.

An interesting theme to emerge associated with fear of failure was that some parents and teachers found it hard to comment on possible reactions to this since, to their knowledge, the students had never experienced failure of a serious nature.

Another theme emerged in connection with the students having contacts with those of similar ability and interests. The parents appreciated the value and need of such contacts. However, they also showed a concern for a balance in the social and academic aspects of the students' lives. There was no undue stress on the importance of comparable ability contacts, which might have indicated a pressure to achieve academically. This theme was also raised in the last chapter where students having enough time to relax and not being over-pressured was discussed.

Some of these issues are raised again in the next chapter and all are discussed in the wider context later.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE**

The role of the school in helping and encouraging children to develop intellectual independence is crucial. As discussed in the literature section, the very able in particular need to develop independence in their whole approach to their learning (Shore et al., 1991), which should include well developed study and research skills. They also need teaching methods which take into account their different learning styles and preferences, as promoted by Eyre (1997a), and they need to be encouraged to vary accordingly the way in which they approach their learning. As a part of this, their preferred pace of learning, their attitude to studying topics in-depth, their special interests and new interests all need to be given consideration. Encouraging the development of their creative thinking skills and, related to this, the facility for using their learning in new and imaginative ways are also seen as important in developing the intellectual independence and imagination of the very able.

These issues were explored in questions which asked the students about their preferred approaches to new learning, their attitudes to independent research and pace of learning. There were also questions on the extent to which their schools gave them opportunities and encouragement to be independent and imaginative in other aspects of their learning and on study and research skills and habits. The students' responses allow a final broad overview of the schools' attitudes in all these areas based on the their experiences and perceptions.

## **Independence in Thinking and Approaching Work: Students' Preferences.**

### **Approach to new learning**

To get some indication of the students' level of independence in their learning and their preference in this, they were asked what their method of approach would be when learning something new. They were also asked what their schools' attitudes were to an independent approach.

When learning something new, seven of the fifteen students welcomed varying degrees of initial guidance, but all then either preferred or were happy to proceed independently. Some of them commented:

“I like to have structure and guidance at first definitely, I mean that's so I can ... be introduced to the topic ... after that I think it's not as necessary, because I can find things out once I have grasped the idea and grasped what's trying to be taught, then I can explore it myself and with other people”. (Ian)

“I probably prefer to get on with it myself but I like to know what to do at the start”. (Andrew)

“I like working in a group sometimes with everyone's ideas but I like working on my own as well. .... To get me going I quite like a bit of guidance just for someone to say ‘well here's the subject, this is what it's about’“. (Margaret)

“I think I like to be guided to a point but .... then it's important that you can go off and learn other things by yourself”. (Thomas)

With one exception these seven students enjoyed doing their own research and all of them were encouraged by their schools to have an independent approach to their work.

Of the remaining eight students one felt he did not need quite so much guidance as he was given:

“I often feel that if you're having lots of guidance, .... and I feel I can do it already, then I like to just go off and write, but .. if the teacher's still talking and you pick up your pen and start writing then they're going to get annoyed with you”.

(Greg)

He preferred to be independent in his first approach to his work but felt in his school independence of this kind was not especially encouraged in lessons, although homework set could sometimes be a piece of research requiring an independent approach, which he enjoyed.

The other seven students also preferred to be independent initially in tackling new work but all were prepared to ask for help when necessary:

“I look at it to see if I can relate it to anything that I do know well, and it's a lot more difficult if I can't. ... If I'm interested in it I'd like to do my own thing and to do it myself”. (Christopher)

“I like to be fairly independent but then I also like to talk over my ideas with say someone sitting next to me ... I always ask for help if I don't understand”.(Lisa)

“You try and do it on your own to start with, but then if you're having difficulty with it, you go back and ask for help and guidance, but to start with I like to do it on my own”. (Sara)

“I read through it a few times until I've got it in my head and then I start taking it into little pieces to figure what I have to do first, and then I have my own little way of doing it which ... sometimes .. really differs from everyone else's”.

(Naomi)

Sara and Naomi disliked doing research on their own, but the other five enjoyed this activity. The latter seven students said, in terms of tackling new topics and individual research, their schools encouraged them to be independent in their approach to their work.

In summary, an overview of the students' responses is given in Figures 28 and 29 below.

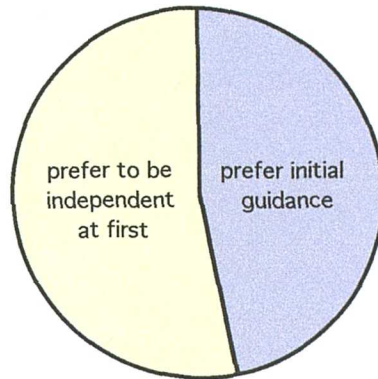


Figure 28: Independence

Without exception the students made it very clear that, with or without initial help, they liked to be independent when they were learning something new, frustration being expressed by one student at not being allowed enough of this kind of independence. Some indicated that they saw this as important for them in, for example, allowing them to explore and find out things for themselves. A liking for doing their own research, expressed by the majority of the students, also indicated their intellectual independence.

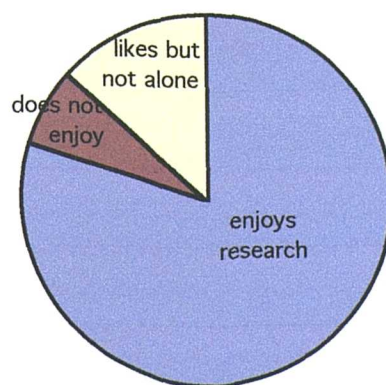


Figure 29: Research



Within this wider issue another dominant theme emerges, that of the variation in their preferred learning styles. The students were evenly divided in their preference or otherwise for initial guidance, and within both groups there is an indication that some students liked to have the whole picture before tackling a topic. For example, one said that she wanted someone to say what the subject was all about, while another wanted to get the topic in her head before breaking it down into little pieces.

Other interesting and very individual variations in learning styles were mentioned. Three of the students said that they liked discussing or exploring issues with others. On this same theme, two said that they did not enjoy researching *alone*. This response from one of the students was slightly paradoxical, in that she was one who liked to approach new learning without initial guidance, and, from the previous chapter, this also applied in her tackling very difficult learning.

The students' comments indicated that all were encouraged by their schools, in varying degrees, to be independent in their approach to their work.

### **Pace of working**

Some writers and researchers see a need for the very able to work at a fast pace (Tilsley, 1981; Porter, 1999). They learn quickly and easily, understand concepts readily and have very good memories. Therefore, in general they like and can cope with a fast pace of learning and usually dislike being made to work at the pace of their more average ability peers, this being one cause of boredom for them (Hollingworth, 1942). They may sometimes, however, need to be encouraged to spend more time on some areas and study topics in depth. On the other hand, some very able students enjoy having the time and opportunity to study certain things of special interest in great depth and detail, so the fast pace is not always appropriate for all of these students (Van Tassel-Baska, cited in Shore et al., 1991; Freeman, 1985).

A question on preferred pace of working produced responses on all these issues. Four students said, without any reservations, that while they were quite prepared to do detailed in-depth work as required, they preferred a fast pace, some adding interesting observations and highlighting difficulties:

“When you have been on something for so long that you just switch off ... just going on and on about the same thing and doing it in different ways. ... I actually quite like working quickly and moving quickly rather than doing loads of examples of the same kind of thing”. (Amy)

“I want to go quite fast, I want to be learning something new all the time because I pick things up quite quickly”. (Greg)

Four students said that they liked a fast pace of working but with certain reservations:

“I don't like just dwelling on the same thing. I like to learn things thoroughly, which is good but sometimes ... when teachers dwell on the same topic for ever ... and I've understood it ... it gets kind of boring”. (Ian)

“It depends on the subject. I mean in maths I like to go at quite a fast pace, just go through it ... but I think in the sciences you have to spend a bit of time to learn the new concepts, but I think generally (I like) quite a fast pace”. (Thomas)

Three students said that, while capable of working at a fast pace when necessary, they nevertheless preferred a slower pace of working, two commenting:

“I prefer to handle the facts and actually learn it and make sure I know it before I go on to the next bit. . . . I prefer to do things in depth - my teacher said I was a perfectionist”. (Richard)

“I like the chance to get it all done and not really rushed, I like the chance to ... read back through it and check that you've got everything and then go on to something else”. (Sara)

Four students had no strong preference in their pace of study and could work quickly or slowly as the occasion demanded, all being willing to do detailed, in-depth work when required, as the following responses illustrated:

“There are some things that I just get really easily, and then the next few lessons we spend actually doing that, I'd rather be moving on to something else, but there are other things that other people get quickly and I would rather have a few more lessons on this”. (Christopher)

“I don't like going so fast that I don't understand it. ... In history - I hate skimming over the top ... because I really like ... to find out exactly what it was like. ... Rarely do I think we are going too slowly - occasionally when I already know quite a lot about that subject”. (Alexa)

Only one of the fifteen students felt that there was not enough flexibility in her schools' attitude to allowing pupils to work at their own pace, particularly when it is a matter of working at a fast pace, finishing the topic early and wanting to move on to something else:

“Generally I think teachers like to feel that they're the one who's telling you what to do rather than you saying ‘can I do this’, so if you've finished something they'll generally have something else lined up”. (Amy)

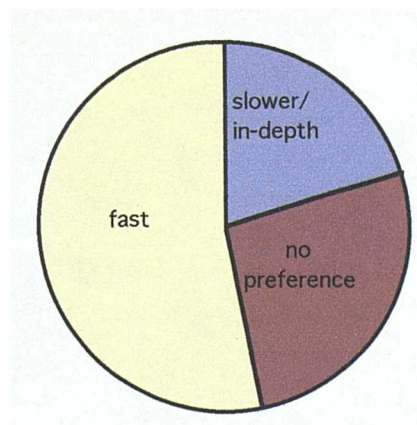


Figure 30: Preferred Pace of Working

In summary, Figure 30 gives an overview of the students' responses. The main theme which emerges here is that, while there was no over-riding preference amongst the students for a fast pace of working, it was important to most of them to

be allowed to work quickly if necessary. Just over half of them referred to a definite preference for a fast pace, but four of these had reservations, such as an interesting reference to the time needed to learn new concepts rather than to learning new facts.

However, even amongst those who had no special preference in their pace of working, two made the point that they learnt easily or their brains worked quickly and once they understood something they liked to move on. Three students indicated a dislike of repetition of work understood and one of these the boredom of this, raising important topics referred to in the last chapter.

The above issues, as in the last section, are all related to learning styles, and those students who preferred the slower pace of working also made interesting comments related to this, indicating the importance to them of thoroughness and full understanding. A similar theme was touched upon by two other students.

Only one student felt there was not enough flexibility in her school to allow students to work at their own pace.

### **Independent and Imaginative Approach to Work**

The extent to which their schools encouraged the students to be independent and imaginative in their approach to their work, in ways other than those described above, was also explored through questions on hypothetical situations involving a variety of learning and thinking styles and approaches. Special emphasis was given to creativity, since this is regarded as one of the important thinking skills to be encouraged and developed in the very able (Freeman 1991). The students' attitudes to using such skills as well as the schools' responses to this were explored in some detail. Other questions covered schools' and teachers' actual or surmised responses to students who wished to pursue their own interests in lesson time, present work in a novel format, and use their learning in imaginative ways.

## **Creative thinking**

As indicated above, one of the questions asked was intended to discover the extent to which the students were independent and creative thinkers in their approach, and therefore capable of solving problems or generally tackling set work in different or unusual ways, rather than following the recommended approach. The students were not tested for creativity but it was felt that being able to see ways of tackling problems other than by the set method would give some indication of their ability in creative thinking, since this is regarded as being one of the characteristics of the creative thinker (Cropley, 1995). Where the students did not understand the term creative thinking a brief explanation was given to them.

In putting the question on this topic, some elaboration was given to all the students, either following their initial attempt to respond or at their request. They were asked whether or not, for example in a science lesson, when approaching an experiment, did they always follow the set method or could they see alternative methods of doing it and want to try them out. They were also asked what the possible reactions to a request to use different methods might be. Thus in their responses there tended to be reference to sciences more than other subjects.

Four students suggested by their comments that looking for alternative methods of solving problems was more-or-less an automatic reaction for them or something they enjoyed and therefore set out to do, although not necessarily in all subjects. Two of these commented:

“I do like doing something that nobody else is doing, ... we had to do a piece of course work in science last week and I tried to do it a different way but it wasn't quite practical, so in the end I had to change it a bit. .... But I do try and do ... something different, then if it doesn't work out ... I can try it again”. (Sara)

“In science ... generally we might work in groups although I prefer to work on my own because I have ideas that other people don't have, I prefer having more unique ideas that no one else's are going to be”. (Richard)

Asked if he could not only see other ways of tackling problems but would automatically look for these he replied:

“Yes - if I could give an example, in science, the last time I did an experiment we had to find out what changed the rate of photosynthesis. ... People changed heat, light, that kind of thing. I decided to be original and I did the carbon dioxide concentration in the water because no one else was doing it, it seemed interesting”. (Richard)

All four of these students said their schools encouraged their use of such creative thinking skills or the unusual approach, in three cases the encouragement being proactive rather than reactive in certain subjects, with one saying that finding different ways of working would be praised.

Eight students were capable of seeing different possible ways of tackling problems, and had done so to a greater or lesser extent, but this was not necessarily an automatic or frequent reaction for them in quite the same way as for the other four. In all cases these eight students had been given a positive response to any attempt to approach their work in this way, although they all felt that the degree of encouragement to do so more extensively would vary. In response to the question as to whether or not they could see different ways of tackling set problems, different from the traditional or set method, some commented:

“Sometimes that's happened, ... in biology specially we get these little sheets saying ... how you're supposed to do it. Sometimes I think ‘well it might be better to do it this way because something different might happen’ and they'll (the teachers) let you do it”. (Margaret)

“Yes, ... things like ...I'm better at maths than most things and .. find different ways of doing the same sum”. (Alan)

“If I know something about it already, ... then quite often I ask if I can do it a bit differently. Normally they (the teachers) would say ‘do this first and then if you've got time go on to do it’ ”. (Greg)

While not discouraging such an approach to tackling work, This student nevertheless felt that the encouragement to do so was not very strong in his school.

One student said she liked to do things her own way yet tended to stick to the recommended method of working:

“If I was ever going to do that, which I probably never would, then I'd ask before I did it. ... I prefer to get on with it ... because .. I want to get it done”.  
(Naomi)

In an answer to a later question, however, she contradicted the above statement when she described how she thought of a way of presenting a geography homework differently from everyone else. Her teacher was very pleased and she said that in her school they were encouraged to be independent and imaginative in this respect.

Only three students were not inclined to see or look for and had not tried alternative possibilities in tackling set problems, being much more comfortable with the recommended approach. One of these said he had never had the experience of seeing an alternative or better way of doing something, adding:

“because usually obviously your teachers know .. what they're doing a lot more than you”. (Gareth)

All three felt their schools would encourage alternative approaches to tackling work although one felt this would vary depending on the teachers concerned:

“I think that ... in science probably you wouldn't be allowed to do it because of the safety aspect, ... some teachers could be more acceptable (sic) than others”.  
(Alexa)

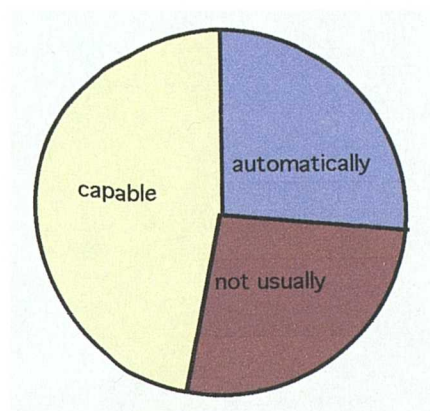


Figure 31: Creative Thinking

In summary, an overview of the students' responses is given in Figure 31. A large majority of the students said or otherwise indicated that they were capable of looking at alternative and imaginative approaches in their learning and the flexibility of ideas that characterises creative thinking. Those who said they did this automatically made observations such as liking to be different and have their own ideas. Amongst those for whom a different approach was not so spontaneous, several indicated some caution in saying or implying that, having seen the possible alternative, they would ask their teachers' permission before attempting it.

This raised the issue of willingness to take the kind of intellectual risks that would be involved in such an approach, with the possibility of the experiment not succeeding. Twelve of these students, in being prepared to try alternative methods, were willing to take such risks. Five of them in the previous chapter said they had some small fear of failure, but that this would not prevent them from taking intellectual risks. Their responses here reinforce those comments. It also raised the issue of the willingness of the three students who had not tried this approach to use such a learning strategy, and their need to be given proactive encouragement in this, for there was no evidence that this was happening in these cases.



All of the students, however, some from actual experience, knew or felt that their schools would allow them to use alternative methods of solving problems, the degree of encouragement to do so being stronger in some than others. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### **Studying something of their own choice in lesson time**

The students were asked what the responses would or might be should they finish the set work early and asked their teachers if they could then study something of their own choice in the lesson time.

Only one student had actually experienced being allowed to pursue a particular interest of his own in school lesson time:

“Sometimes you do get to go down to the library and use the computers and things like that... but they can only take six at a time”. (Greg)

The remaining students could only speculate what the response would be. Six of them were unsure but felt it would probably be positive. Two others emphasised that the planned work would have to be completed before this would be allowed. In answer to the question whether or not this would be acceptable these students replied:

“Yes, I think so, if they didn't have any other work for you to do”. (Alan)

“Yes ... if you finished all your work, I think you would get a chance to do anything”. (Sara)

Two other students said that there was always so much to do, or planned for lessons, that the situation where you would have time to pursue an interest of your own choice in lesson time did not arise. However, both of these felt there would be a very positive response if it did, one commenting:

“That doesn't normally happen, because the teachers plan so much ... there's such a lot to do, (but if it did happen) they would definitely encourage it - they always encourage you to learn”. (Lisa)

Another two felt that there would be a less enthusiastic response in their schools to a request to pursue a personal interest in lesson time:

“To some degree yes, I suppose (you would be allowed). ... They'll discuss it with you, ... but they're more keen on you actually doing it in your own time”. (Amy).

Yet another two believed that responses in their schools would vary depending on the teachers concerned, one commenting:

“I think different teachers would have different reactions to it. Some would sort of say ‘I'm happy with what you are doing now’ some would say ‘OK’ ”. (Thomas)

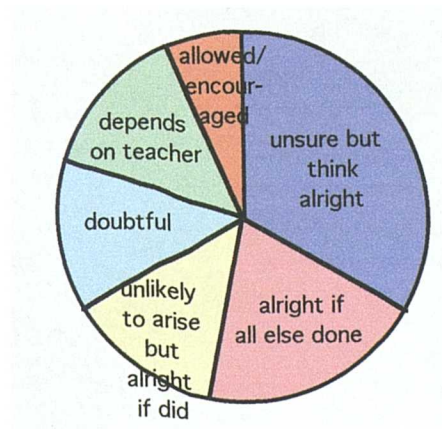


Figure 32: Choice of Study in Lessons

In summary, Figure 32 gives an overview of the students' responses. Most of the students felt that, if they had completed set work, a request to study a topic of their own choice in the lesson would receive a positive response from their teachers. Two had doubts about this and one of these said he thought this would not be acceptable. This indicates a perceived willingness by the teachers to respond flexibly to the learning needs of their very able pupils. However, two students felt that this kind of response would vary in their schools depending on the teachers concerned.

A theme which emerged within the students' comments on this wider issue was that, in two cases, the students felt that there was little likelihood of an opportunity to pursue work of their own choice, because so much work was planned for them to do in their lessons. This suggests that the teachers were ensuring that some form of provision was being made for their very able pupils.

### **Presenting work in an unusual format**

The extent to which students would be allowed to present work in an unusual way, different from that expected or from the recommended and accepted format, was explored in an attempt to ascertain the degree of flexibility in schools in accommodating different learning styles, as, for example, in the use of cognitive maps in preference to pages of notes and diagrams.

Four students had experienced their schools' attitudes to imaginative presentation of work. Two had had positive responses to their attempts in this respect, one commenting:

"You always get ... better marks if you do something more interesting and not the same as everybody else. Like when we had to do this geography piece of work we had to do about the rain forests, everybody did newspaper, and I thought 'I'll do something different then' so I did this conversation between two people ... about rain forests, somebody who didn't know anything about it and somebody explaining it to them. ... He (the teacher) liked the way I set it out". (Naomi)

The other two said that the unusual approach was overtly encouraged in their schools, one of these quoting a subject in which this was strongly promoted by the teacher:

"A lot of the things we do are for our personal benefit - well ... most of the things we do, so ... they don't really mind us presenting it (work) in a different way, ... in R.E. especially, she tells us to present it however we think we should be able to understand". (Margaret)

One student, although never having attempted a different and imaginative way of presenting her work, nevertheless believed her school would be pleased if she tried this, while another felt that his school would actually prefer the imaginative approach:

“If we were given a question to answer in history or something, and it (the different method of presentation) did actually answer the question adequately, and did everything that all the other ones did, just in a different way, then I think the teacher would be kinder towards that, ... they'd like that more than the standard (format)”.

(Christopher)

Of the remaining nine students one said that, since it had never happened, he did not know what his school's reaction would be if he attempted a different way of presenting his work. Six students felt it would be acceptable. The other two would take the precaution of asking before attempting it. One of these, on reflection, felt that if she did ask to be allowed to do this the response would be positive:

“If it still had all the information in there ... yes they definitely would (allow this)”. (Lisa)

The other student, however, was uncertain of the response she might have to unusual presentation of her work commenting:

“I think that if I wanted to do it in a different way from what I knew was generally accepted, I think I'd ask before I spent time doing it the other way”. (Amy)

In summary an overview of the students' responses is given in Figure 33. Only two students were uncertain of what their teachers' responses might be to presenting work in an unusual way, to the extent that they felt unable to offer a definite opinion on this. The remainder had enough confidence in their teachers' willingness to be flexible to say they thought unusual presentation would be accepted. Some, from their actual experiences, commented with certainty that this would be warmly received, while others' perceptions were that their teachers would be pleased or even prefer the unusual format. This again suggests that in most cases teachers

were willing to accommodate the students' different learning styles, and in some they were actively promoting their use.

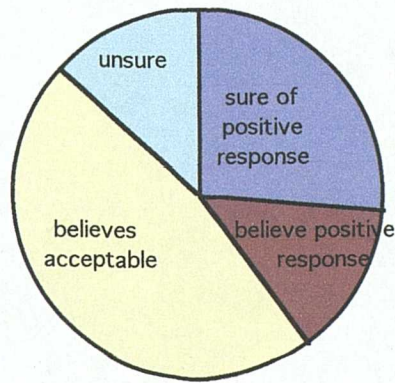


Figure 33: Unusual Presentation of Work

### Using learning in new and imaginative ways

The schools' reaction to the students wanting to use their learning in new and imaginative ways in lesson time was also explored. The students were asked how their teachers might react if, for example, they asked to be allowed, with some friends, to read poetry being studied into a tape recorder or act out part of a play and record it on video, to be played back.

Three students had experienced being warmly encouraged to use their learning in a new and imaginative way. They said this happened as a part of the teaching pattern in lessons:

“That scenario would be (allowed), and it's often something that's already part of the teaching structure”. (Alexa)

Another of the three, commenting on the response she might get from her English teacher to such a suggestion replied:

“She'd like that yes .... we do that all the time actually, ... she knows we're going to be able to catch up”. (Fiona)

Two others, while not having had such an experience, nevertheless felt that their teachers' responses would be very positive. Asked if any idea they suggested in this respect would be accepted they commented:

“Yes, I think they would be quite pleased about it”. (Alan)

“I think it probably would, it would probably be appreciated too”. (Ian)

On the other hand two students believed that such an approach to their teachers would be met with a negative response, one of these judging from a specific incident when he and a friend asked to be allowed to use a video camera to present some work. He commented:

“Let's say you can do that so long as you're going to do it out of school, in your own time”. (Greg)

The remaining eight students did not have actual experiences from which to judge but felt that in general, the response to wanting to use their learning in different ways would probably be positive, although six of these added qualifying comments, for example:

“I'm not sure .... it'd probably be allowed. ... Definitely, certainly it'd depend on the teacher, whether they were prepared to give up their own time, I suppose, to help you”. (Gareth)

“If you were ... miles ahead of what he (the teacher) would consider you should be ... then yes”. (Amy)

In summary, an overview of the students' responses is given in Figure 34. The picture to emerge here is very similar to that in the last section. There were only two students who, while not having a direct experience of asking to use their learning in alternative ways, nevertheless must have had responses from their teachers in other situations which made them feel that such a request would not be given a positive

response. The remaining students all either felt or knew from experience that, in general, their teachers would allow them to use new learning strategies in this way. Where qualifying comments were made, the theme of the responses varying depending on the teacher concerned re-emerged.

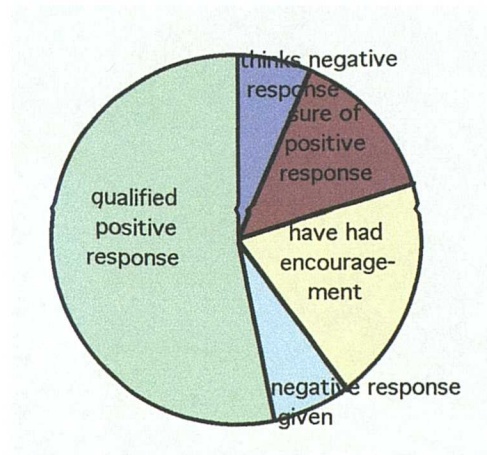


Figure 34: Using Knowledge in Different Ways

Some students had been given very positive encouragement to use such imaginative approaches and others felt the response to any request to do this would be especially well received, the perceptions being that the teachers would be pleased or appreciate this. Once again, therefore, there was evidence that students, in general, felt they were being or would be encouraged to use different and imaginative approaches to their work.

## **Importance to the Students of being Independent and Imaginative in Approach to Work.**

Without exception the students like to be allowed to be independent and imaginative in their general approach to their learning. When asked if they thought this was important all gave positive responses, some adding qualifying comments:

“I think it's important that one's able to develop an idea .... it must be a good thing if you're learning to explore ideas because it shows you understand them”.

(Fiona)

“Yes, I think it is, else you'd just become a robot and you won't have a mind of your own, I think you have to be able to think for yourself”. (Thomas)

## **Final Overview of Students' Perceptions of Schools' Attitudes to Intellectual Independence**

Taking a final overview of the students' experiences or perceptions, in response to a general question on this issue they said that they felt that their schools to a greater or lesser extent did encourage them to be independent and imaginative in their approach to their work.

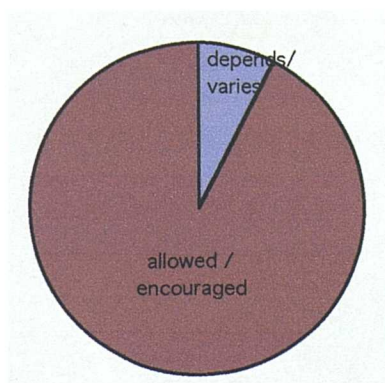


Figure 35: Independence in Working  
Schools' Attitude

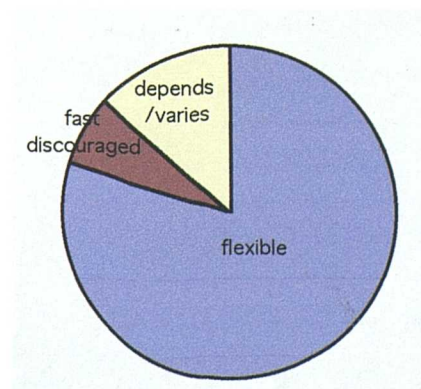


Figure 36: Pace of Working  
Schools' Attitude



Summarising the students' responses to the specific areas explored, only one of the fifteen students felt there was not enough independence allowed in lessons with regard to learning new topics and research. Another student felt that there was not a great deal of flexibility in her school's attitude to allowing pupils to work at a fast pace. (Figures 35 and 36). All of the schools encouraged or the students felt they would encourage alternative/creative approaches to problem solving, although in varying degrees (Figure 37). However, only three students mentioned *proactive* encouragement in this respect.

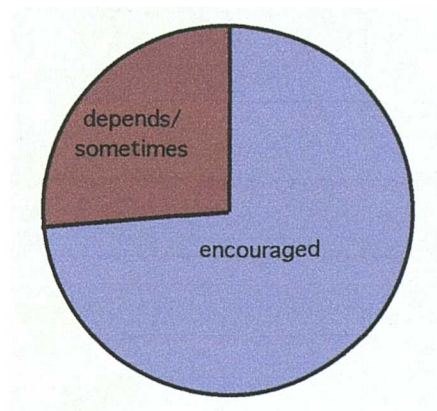


Figure 37: Creative Thinking Schools' Attitude

In being allowed to pursue their own interests in lesson time, present work in an unusual way and use their learning in new and imaginative ways, a positive picture of the teachers' actual or perceived responses emerged. In each case only two students, not the same two each time, either felt they could not comment, they had doubts or that the responses from their teachers would be negative. Amongst the remaining students there was a general confidence that their teachers would either be willing to allow the students to use new and imaginative approaches, or that they would encourage this.

However, here again in all these areas there was not a lot of evidence of proactive encouragement to use such strategies. The all over picture which emerges,

therefore, is that the students knew or believed that the majority of their teachers were or would have been flexible in allowing them to use and develop different learning strategies and styles. In several of the areas discussed, while some students commented that their teachers not only allowed this but actively encouraged and promoted such an approach in their work, a number of them needed more proactive encouragement in using some learning strategies.

The viewpoints of the *individual* students are summarised on Table IX (Appendix III). Five of them gave a consistently positive picture of their schools' encouragement to them to be imaginative and independent in their approach to their work generally, and in all areas specifically mentioned in the questions. Seven gave a mainly positive picture, with just some reservations in certain areas, these varying from student to student. Between them these twelve students represented all five schools. Three students gave quite a mixed picture, with at least one area where they felt they did not get positive encouragement in this respect. These three were all in different schools. Therefore the experiences and perceptions of different students in the same schools were variable. No student, however, gave an all over negative impression of his or her school's attitude in this connection. (Figure 38).

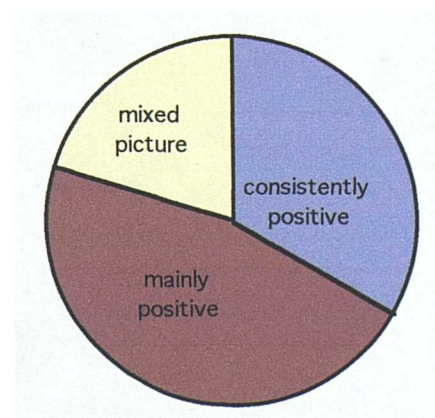


Figure 38: Intellectual Independence, Schools' General Response

## **Study Habits and Skills**

Good study habits and skills, including research skills, require a degree of independence in students' approach to their work and therefore there is a connecting link between this and the previous section, in which independence is a major issue.

Four of the five schools offered specific guidance on good study skills. In all four this was a structured part of a Personal and Social Education (PSE) course. In three of these schools the subject was covered in some depth. The remaining school concentrated mainly on examination revision skills. In all five schools subject teachers gave guidance on study and research skills relevant to their own subjects. On this issue in general a student commented:

“We have PSE lessons and we spend a lot of time tackling time organisation, revision, and how to have notes and what's important for good revision ... we really do get advice but we're not pressured to use that style. ... A lot of time we are encouraged to learn things in ways that suit us”. (Lisa)

In response to the question on how they organised studying in their own time, such as doing homework and exam revision, ten of the students said they felt that they were well organised and planned such work, some elaborating on this, for example:

“I try being organised. When I get homework .... I quite often have to write a list - because we get a lot of homework - write a list of the priority of the work I've got to do .. and the date it's due. I like organising things like that”. (Richard)

“When we're ... set a GCSE topic or exam revision we've always got other work on the go, but what I usually try and do is get all the little bits of homework, which have just been set from the lesson .. get all of them done and then after that I'll move on to the revision or whatever. I try to organise it so I've got, say, a certain amount of time to do it in and I spend that amount of time on it and don't try and do more”. (Amy)

“Doing my homework I like it to be all quiet and I can concentrate and have a good atmosphere to be able to do it in. ... In exam revision I actually have got a little tape recorder ... and I tape my notes onto that, then I can listen to it and look through my notes as well and that helps me learn it much, much better. ... If I've got a test on the Wednesday and I know about it on the Friday, I'll do some notes over the weekend and tape them, then every night I'll listen to it.”. (Margaret)

Three students did not regard themselves as especially well organised:

“I don't have a time table or things like that. .... I normally do homework after I come in if I've gone out at night ... then I probably put it in order of priority, whichever is the biggest I do first, or sometimes if there is a really little piece I get that out of the way. (I) suppose there's a little bit of a method.”. (Andrew)

One said she was *fairly* organised and methodical and another said she was a lot more organised than she was the previous year, she commented:

“Homework, ... last year it was a case of doing it the day before it was supposed to be handed in ... this year I've tried to have a bit more of an organised approach, doing it as I get it to make things easier .. and I think this is a much better and easier way of doing things”. (Lisa)

Of the fifteen students nine had never actively sought advice on good study habits and skills, a few giving brief reasons for this as follows:

“I think I've got a good idea of how (to tackle it) - my way of doing it”.  
(Sara)

Four students had approached their parents or another relative for some advice but did not elaborate greatly on this. The remaining two students had talked to ‘people’ about some aspect of study skills,

Without exception the students appreciated the need for good study skills and habits and, in response to the question on whether or not they considered these skills and habits important, some of them responded:

“Yes, very important because a lot of my friends they're not very organised in the way they revise and the way they do homework and it shows in their grades, ...

one of my friends used to do her homework in front of the television and she actually told me when she stopped doing that, that her grades started to go up”. (Margaret)

“From the beginning of school, if you're used to putting in a couple of hours a night actually doing work then you've got into the habit. ... I think the work's going to get a lot heavier towards GCSEs, ... I'm sure they'll be very useful then”. (Christopher)

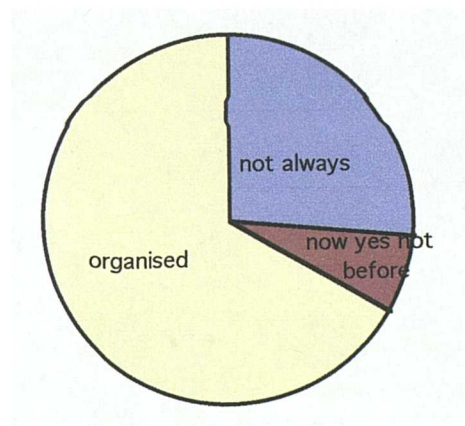


Figure 39: Organisation of Private Study Time

In summary, an overview of the students’ responses on organisation of their study time are shown in Figure 39. Some students commented on the study skills programmes offered by their schools, two mentioning the encouragement given to be independent in developing the styles of study and revision which suited them best. This independence was also evident in the students’ responses on whether or not they had ever actively sought advice from others, with a few saying they had done so but indicating that this had been minimal.

Some highly individual strategies for private study and revision were described by some of the students, especially by the student who said she used tape recorded as well as written notes in revision for a test or exam. This student had

discovered for herself that she learnt best by using her auditory and visual senses together.

Most of the students felt they were well organised in their approach to private study and all saw the need for good study skills and habits. In this section, therefore, in general the students' independence in all matters relative to their approach to private study was evident from their responses, but a theme which emerged once again, within this, was their great individuality in learning styles and strategies.

### Responses of Teachers and Parents

The views of these two groups together with those of the students have been summarised on Table IX (Appendix III).

The levels of agreement in views between the three groups on the students' independence in tackling new learning, their preferred pace of working and their creative thinking in problem solving will be discussed first. These levels of agreement are shown in Figure 40.

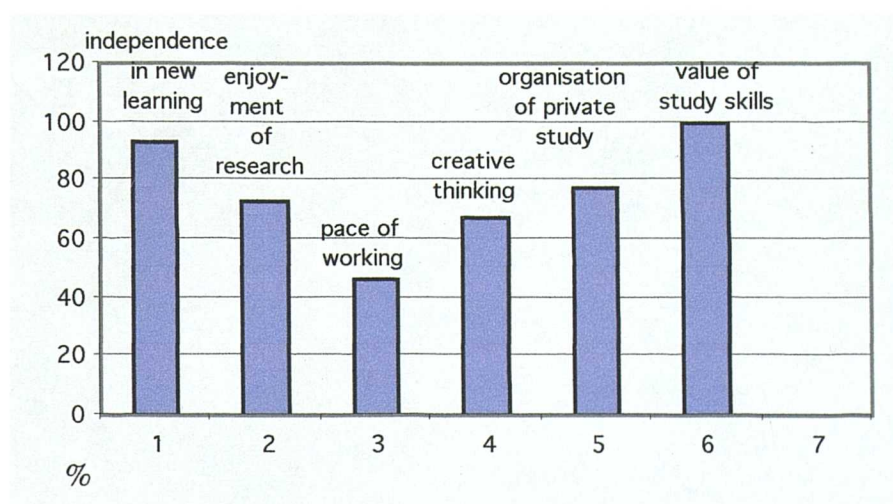


Figure 40: Levels of Agreement on Students' Responses on Intellectual Independence



The schools' responses on these topics will be discussed later, together with their responses on other related issues connected with encouraging intellectual independence. Levels of agreement on these issues are shown in Figure 40. The comments on agreement of views are on the same basis as in the previous chapters.

### **Independence in thinking and approaching work: students' preferences**

On the students' independence in their approach to their learning, the parents' question asked them to comment on the students' independence when studying at home. The teachers were asked the question relative to the students' independence when tackling new learning in the classroom, so that both were well placed to give opinions on this issue. Levels of responses from the two groups were good, with only three teachers being unable to comment.

The almost undisputed independence of the students in their learning emerged strongly in the responses, and since both groups were likely to have had first hand experiences of the students' approaches in this, the picture presented should be accurate. All of the parents and eleven of the teachers agreed with the students', who, without exception, said they liked to be or were independent in their learning. The following are illustrations of the responses given to the question on whether or not the students were independent in this way:

“Stubbornly so, which is good. Up in his bedroom . . . sitting on his sofa. . . If he needs a computer . . he will come down and use it.” (parent).

“I should think she is very independent, she gets on with her work, because in the twenty minutes (Form Period) she's always got a topic to be getting on with . . there's always something she's actually creating”. (teacher).

Only one teacher disagreed with both student and parents on this matter but this was a teacher who, by her own admission, did not have a sympathetic relationship with her student, which could explain this anomaly.

The level of response on the students' enjoyment of research was not so high, with fourteen parents commenting but only two teachers. Levels of agreement of views were quite good but mainly where the students said they enjoyed doing their own research and all views given corresponded, one parent commenting:

"Oh yes, definitely (enjoys doing research), he's going to love it if he gets to university . . . he'll still go round researching everything".

The inability of the teachers to comment is not very surprising, since this question asked them to give an opinion on the students' feelings about and reactions to doing research. This is something the students had, perhaps, never discussed with them. Furthermore, research is something more likely to be done outside the classroom, in the students' own time and especially at home, so parents would feel more confident in giving an opinion.

The picture to emerge connected with the students' preferred pace of working was not so clear cut, although response levels were quite good. While nine parents agreed with the students' various views, only five of their teachers did. In four cases where the teachers disagreed it was in believing the students preferred a fast pace where the students had not said this. One of these students said she definitely preferred a slow pace and her parents agreed commenting that she liked:

"A very slow pace, when she does anything it should be very neat".

It is difficult to give possible reasons for the all over low level of agreement of views but especially for the difference in perceptions shown in the teachers' views or their inability to comment, since they should have been well placed to judge this from classroom responses.

There was greater consensus of opinion on the issue of the students' creative thinking, the general view being that the large majority of the students could and did think creatively. One teacher gave an illustration of an incident where the student had shown an ability to think in this way:



“When they were in Year 8, . . . in PSE they had to build a structure, as tall as can be, out of paper and sellotape and his group were the ones that did it, . . . and they all had their little say and then he would say something – excellent leadership”.

In three cases both parents and teachers took the view that the students could or did think creatively where the students did not. However, the level of agreement with the students’ comments was quite high. There was only one student who felt she was a creative thinker whose teacher did not. The teacher concerned was the teacher who felt her student was not independent in her learning. In two of the four cases where the students said creative thinking was an automatic response for them in approaching a problem, both parents and teachers agreed.

This is, again, an area where the picture to emerge should have substance, being based on first hand observations of responses by the students to situations or ‘problems’ which arose at home or in school, and which gave opportunities for a creative approach in their solution.

### **Schools’ responses**

The schools’ responses on all of the above issues and the extent to which they encourage, in other ways, an independent and imaginative approach by the students to their learning is considered next. In all cases the parents were asked for their own views rather than what they knew of the students views on these issues, so that unless there had been discussion with the students, their comments were somewhat speculative. This resulted in quite a low level of parent response in some areas. This also applied to some of the teachers who commented on their own attitude to these issues but were not always willing to speculate on what their colleagues’ responses generally might be (Figure 41).

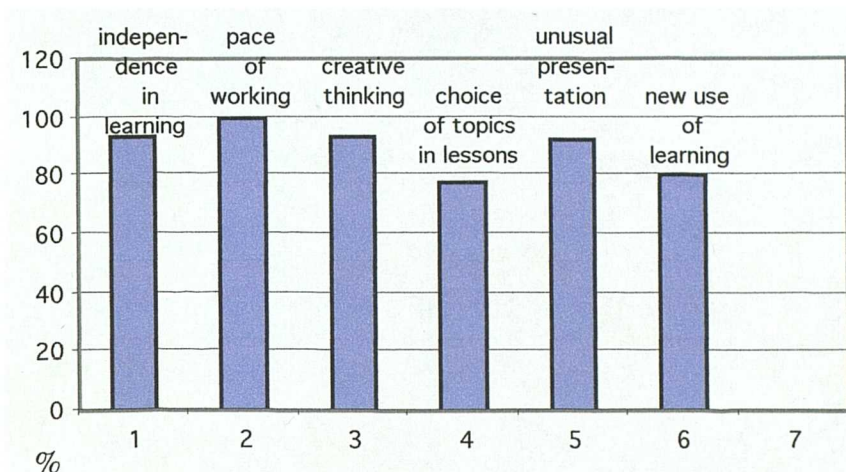


Figure 41: Levels of Agreement on Schools' Attitudes to Intellectual Independence

#### *General independence in learning and pace*

Although the students were asked twice about their schools' response in allowing them to be independent in their approach to their learning, once in a specific connection, once more generally, teachers and parents were asked about this only once. It was asked as a general or overview question, taking into account all the specific areas discussed. The level of response from both groups was good with all the teachers and twelve parents commenting. All fifteen students had given a positive view of what they believed their schools' general attitudes would be in encouraging them to be independent in their learning, with the same qualification being made by eight of them that this would depend on the teacher concerned. All of the teachers agreed that, in general, the students were given such encouragement in their schools, and fourteen of the parents also gave positive responses, for example:

"It goes back to allowing (her) to give extra and allowing her to look at things in different aspects and to go off and research things and bring things in and say to her . . 'this is wonderful'".

“The work now seems to be a lot of you go away you research it and you come back and present it. . . The emphasis seems to be on ‘use your own initiative’ and you’re set a task and you come back and do it, and they send them to do the research, which makes them think for themselves.”

Responses on the subject of the degree of flexibility in the schools on the pace at which students worked were quite good but, in the ten cases where there was comment, there was full agreement with the views of the students in feeling that they were allowed some flexibility. Two of the teachers, however, added the qualifying comment that the amount of flexibility allowed would depend on the teacher.

### *Independence in thinking and approaching work*

The level of response on creative thinking - allowing different approaches to problem-solving, was good. All of the parents and teachers who commented felt that there would be some encouragement in this respect. This showed a high level of agreement with the views of the students, all but one of whom had felt sure that their schools would react positively to this kind of approach. However, two students felt that although this approach would be allowed in their schools, encouragement in this would depend on the teacher concerned. The parents of one of these and the teachers of five others also made this observation, one of these teachers commenting:

“It depends on the subject, it depends on the teacher, but in general terms that is part of the learning experiences they should all be going through and so yes that (encouragement) is there”.

While nine teachers commented on the issue of the students being allowed to study a topic of their own choice in lesson time, if all set work had been completed, only three parents felt able to give an opinion on this. There were comments from the other groups for a total of seven of the eleven students who gave a generally positive response on this, all agreeing with the students. However, picking up the theme from earlier sections, six students qualified this by saying it would depend on the teacher

concerned and the parents and teacher of one of these endorsed this view. Two other teachers also made this comment.

Responses on schools giving pupils the flexibility to present their work in unusual ways were good, with ten of the parents and all of the teachers commenting. With the exception of just one parent all these responses were positive. Even where two students had felt unable to give an opinion on this, their parents and teachers gave generally positive responses. Again here, however, four teachers and one parent felt that the response would depend on the teacher concerned. One of these teachers commented on the idea of students presenting homework in an unusual format as follows:

“I do have children come in with a totally different way of doing something and usually I’m so surprised and so impressed and so in awe that I didn’t think of it, that I tend to be more positive about that particular homework than the run of the mill stuff. . . I think it would depend on the teacher but I get the impression that a lot of people would feel the same way”.

This same reservation is expressed in the comments on whether or not students would be allowed to use their learning in new or different and imaginative ways in the classroom. The level of responses was quite high and there was full agreement with twelve of the thirteen students who felt a request to work in this way would, in general, be accepted. However, while none of these students expressed such a reservation about this, three of their teachers did so.

### **Study habits and skills**

The teachers were asked if the students had sought advice or guidance on study habits and skills in school and the parents if they had sought help in this at home. Without exception the teachers said the students had not done so, in complete accord with the students’ comments. There was less agreement of views between parents and students here, with the parents of only one of four students agreeing that

such help had been sought. On the other hand, five other parents said the students had asked for help or guidance, where the students had not mentioned this. Possibly this was a difference in perceptions of what constituted asking for help or guidance, or even simply a matter of remembering. However, the general picture to emerge was that at the time few students had approached anyone for help or advice.

Only parents were asked about how well organised the students were in their private study at home, since teachers were unlikely to have any knowledge of this. All the parents commented on this issue and there was quite a good level of agreement with the students' views, with only four disagreeing with the students' comments. The parents of one student commented on the way she organised herself as follows:

“she goes to her room, she has it quiet and gets on with it. . . She knows what has to be done for when . . . She's not the sort of child you suggest has a timetable, you merely find out what it is, when she tells you”.

Where parents gave an opinion on the importance for the students of good study habits and skills, they fully agreed with the students in believing in the value of these.

In summary, considering first the issue which is the focus of this chapter, that of the students' attitudes to independence in their approach to their work, in general the consensus of parents' and teachers' views was quite a strong endorsement of the students' indication that they liked to be independent and flexible in their learning styles. However, there were variations in levels of responses and agreement of views on the issues of the students' enjoyment of doing research and their preferred pace of working, where endorsement came mainly from their parents with few teachers commenting. Possible reasons for this have been suggested in the main discussion. On the issue of students' independence in their approach to private study, both parents

and teachers agreed with the students' that few had sought advice in study skills and most were independent and well organised in their private study.

The schools' responses and attitudes to allowing the students' to be independent and imaginative in their work were also considered. The parents' and teachers' perceptions of the schools were, in general, that there was flexibility and they did allow the students to use different styles and strategies in their learning. This reflected closely the views of the students. Within this broad picture, however, a theme which emerged repeatedly was that parents, teachers and students, in varying numbers and depending on the issue, added the qualification that the degree to which this was allowed depended on the teachers concerned. An interesting aspect of this was that the teachers made such comments almost as often as their students, showing objectivity in their observations and thereby suggesting these have some reliability.

Finally, the positive and negative responses of parents and teachers are spread across the five schools. No school emerges as either completely positive or completely negative in allowing the students flexibility and in encouraging them to be independent in their learning styles. This reflects the picture presented by the students and indicates in these two groups also a variation in perceptions of the likely attitudes and responses on these issues within the individual schools.

## **CHAPTER XII**

### **THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH: A DISCUSSION OF THE DATA PROVIDED BY THE RESPONDENTS**

The students who took part in this research project were all high achievers for whom there was evidence of their high ability in all or most areas of the curriculum, this being the basis on which they were selected by their schools for this study. Their achievements were outstanding in various assessment tests, achievements of the kind normally associated with and indicative of very able students. Their high ability has subsequently been verified by some very impressive GCSE results.

To judge the extent to which the needs of these particular students correspond with those in the list of the perceived needs of very able students as extracted from the literature is not, however, quite straightforward. Many of their particular needs related to their high ability must have been met for them to be so successful. There is, therefore, an analysis of the needs which existed and appear to have been already satisfied, whether or not these remain current needs and any other existing needs which are indicated by the students' comments. All of these, past or present, are included in the final list of needs of this group of students and there is an evaluation of the extent to which their current needs are being met.

The following discussion of the findings, arising from the chapters on presentation of data, will follow the same format as those chapters. There is first an opening section discussing the concept of 'need', giving a definition of this, and indicating the way in which I have interpreted the students' comments in terms of indicating where there is a 'need'. There is then an analysis of the over all picture of the students' needs followed by a summary and a list of the needs which have emerged from the students' responses.

## THE CONCEPT OF 'NEED' AND A DEFINITION

Maslow (cited in Maslow, 1987) recognises two categories of needs. The lower or physiological needs, such as food and water, are those essential for human survival, and the higher needs, which he proposes can only emerge when the lower needs have been satisfied. At the top of his hierarchy of needs is the need for self-actualization, that is the need for self-fulfilment, realisation of potential etc. The lower needs therefore could be viewed as those factors which are essential for the physical survival of the person, the others are not essential and someone could survive without their being satisfied.

However, while this may be true, if the higher needs are not satisfied this may lead to all sorts of problems. Rogers (cited in Hayes, 1998) makes this point in suggesting that for psychological health the need for positive regard and self-actualization is indispensable. Thus while the person could survive without these needs being satisfied, it might be little more than physical existence.

It follows that the educational needs of very able or gifted children come into the category of higher needs. Therefore it is not *essential* for these to be met. However, as will be shown, meeting their needs gives them an increased opportunity for self-actualization, and so, arguably, to be psychologically happier.

The word 'need' is defined in the New Oxford Dictionary as to "require (something) because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable". Since I could not ask the students directly if they saw the various issues discussed as 'needs', because this would have been 'begging the question', I sought to find out if there was a need by asking if issues were important to them. Therefore, and supported by the dictionary definition, I have interpreted their confirmation that



something is important to them as indicating a need, although not in the sense of being essential for their survival.

## **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS**

### **To Be Socially Integrated and Feel a Part of Society**

All the issues or subsidiary needs related to this broad area of need were discussed under the headings of awareness, understanding and acceptance of high ability, its implications and consequences, and social relationships.

#### **Awareness, understanding and acceptance of high ability, its implications and consequences**

Students are unlikely to understand the implications of their high ability until they become aware that they have such ability and the nature of that ability. As discussed in the literature, one of the major implications of very high ability, especially where the ability is 'across the board' and includes all the intellectual areas, can be the hostile responses to some of these 'clever' students by their peers (McLeod and Cropley, 1989; Kerry, 1992). These students therefore need skills to enable them to cope with such responses.

#### ***Early and current awareness of ability***

Only five students were aware from a very early stage that they were very able. In none of these cases was any influence of parents or teachers / schools suggested in this early awareness. The remaining ten, for various reasons, recognised their ability at a later stage, some only when they had the results of various tests taken

towards the end of their primary school careers. This raised the question as to whether or not their parents were aware of their children's ability and, if so, had they deliberately not communicated this to the students? However, of these ten students, in nine cases there was no indication that the parents had consciously failed to communicate to the students that they had very high ability, even in those cases where the parents had themselves realised this from an early stage. In just one case was there a slight implication that not drawing attention to the student's ability had been a conscious decision by her parents.

It is difficult to speculate on the role of their primary school teachers in the students' lack of early awareness of ability. However, there is some evidence that, in the later stages of primary education, in some schools there was an openness in recognition of high ability, and thereby indication to the students of this, by prizes for achievement and grouping by ability for lessons.

The part played by the various assessment tests taken in late primary school was an interesting aspect of the stage at which the students became fully aware of the extent of their high academic ability. These were necessary for five of the fifteen students in making them fully aware and for two in confirming their ability. This suggests a reluctance in some students to acknowledge / accept their high ability, evidenced by the comments of those who attributed it to other factors. It also indicates an interesting dependence on or *need* for evidence of a quantitative nature, test grades or marks allowing a very real comparison with the achievements of others, in a way not easy with non-quantitative evaluation.

There was no evidence that a very early awareness was necessary to the students in learning the coping skills needed to deal with negative attitudes, since some of those who had such difficulties in their current schools were not aware until quite late that they were very able. They had, nevertheless, needed to and had learnt to cope very well with any hostile responses from peers to their ability and their high achievements.

An awareness of high ability at any stage may not bring with it an automatic reaction by the students that they may have to cope with negative responses to this by peers. This is strongly supported by the comments of these fifteen students, all of whom said they responded very positively to becoming aware of their high ability and not one of whom suggested that hostile responses by peers occurred to them as a consequence of this. Such a positive acceptance and view of their ability may have helped those concerned in coping with negative responses and this will be discussed later. It appears that awareness of possible negative responses consequent upon their high ability came mainly when they were actually encountered, directly or indirectly, and strategies were developed to cope with these. Furthermore, this study has shown that it is by no means inevitable that such responses will occur, eight of the fifteen students having had no such experiences. For them development of strategies for coping with hostility had not been necessary, but, as discussed later, some of them indicated their need to be aware of the possibility of negative responses in terms of what was necessary to avoid these.

At the time of the interviews, all of the students appeared to be fully cognisant of their levels of ability, including in the non-intellectual areas such as interpersonal and leadership skills so important for their social integration. They were very objective / honest in discussing areas where they thought they were socially challenged, such as the four students who indicated that they suffered from a slight but not incapacitating lack of social confidence in certain circumstances. They were also very aware of their high intellectual abilities and that they were regarded as 'clever' and many referred to both positive and negative social implications of this for them. Their need for such an awareness is touched on again below.

### *Attitudes and responses to the advantages and responsibilities of high ability*

As indicated, very able students need to feel comfortable with and accepting of their ability and not to want to hide it or to deliberately underachieve for any reason, such as the anti-intellectual attitudes referred to by Butler-Por (1993). A positive attitude could be regarded as important, therefore, with appreciation of the ability and of any advantages accruing from it.

At the time of the interviews, without exception, the fifteen students were comfortable in the knowledge of and accepting of their high ability, with three mentioning having at some stage an associated sense of pride in it. A majority of them could see advantages associated with their high ability, mainly in terms of helping their social relationships. For four of them a wider circle of friends had grown from their extra curricular activities and interests both in and out of school. Such activities would allow them to meet others of similar interests and ability, the kind of contacts which very able students are believed to need and enjoy and so an ease of relationships in these contexts is not really surprising. Other ways mentioned in which relationships were helped by their high ability were in the good will accruing from being able to help others and also in relating to adults. It is a characteristic of very able students that they often like or even prefer the company of adults and older students (Porter, 1999; Freeman, 1979), a topic which re-emerges later.

Responses to feeling fortunate were also very positive with all but one student expressing such feelings. This might have been more surprising but for the fact that, as explained, so many had been able to see advantages in their high ability. As is shown in the next section, even those who were targets of negative attitudes had developed coping strategies for dealing with this. They did not feel resentful about their ability or, a response suggested by Tempest (1974), that they wanted to reject or hide it. None of the students said that a positive attitude in terms of feeling fortunate and being able to see benefits in their high ability was a need in terms of accepting and being comfortable with it. However, the students who suffered most from

negative attitudes were amongst those who spoke in some detail about the advantages of their ability. It seems, therefore, that such positive attitudes could have been important in helping them not to respond negatively to hostility. From this a positive attitude to the advantages of their high ability could be regarded as having been important or an implied need for seven of the students.

The students were also positive in their responses in feeling they should 'give back' in some way as in helping others, especially those less able than themselves. However, when asked about feeling a specific responsibility to give back five of the fifteen, although quite willing to help others, did not do this from a *conscious* feeling of having a responsibility to do so.

Arising from the comments of some writers and researchers (Heller, 1993; Cropley and Dehn, 1996), this was listed as one of the needs of very able students but a need which is different from all the others listed in that it is not seen as a need which must be met for them to succeed educationally. It is seen rather as a need for them to be willing to offer society some benefit from their ability, or, as it is referred to here, of their 'being willing to give back'. In that they were all willing to and did 'give back' by helping others and saw this as important, they had already realised this need. However, this could fairly be regarded as an on-going need in terms of future giving of something of benefit to society in general, which only one of the students had marginally touched on.

It could be argued, however, that from the experiences of these students, this also could be regarded as an on-going social need insofar as where it results in their helping others, especially those not so able as themselves, their interpersonal relationships are helped, one student making this point. This, in turn, helps them in reducing the likelihood of hostile responses from those less able. Evidence of this was given by two of the students who were *not* the targets of negative attitudes and who felt that one of the main reasons for this was they were willing to help others. This issue is raised again in the next section.

*Coping with negative attitudes; recognition of achievement; other disadvantages of high ability*

As noted earlier, for some able students the negative responses of others, especially their peers, can be a problem. Fewer than half of the students who took part in this study were or had been the targets of negative responses in their present schools. Amongst those who had existing or earlier problems of this nature, in all but three cases the students regarded these as being minor and not having great impact. The other three students who had greater problems did not regard them as really major difficulties.

The eight students who had no difficulties of this kind were asked what they thought was the reason for this. Their replies were very consistent in suggesting that the principal reason was their own basic personalities insofar as they related and responded easily to others. Some noted the importance of not boasting or being arrogant about their ability in helping good relationships or, by implication, in avoiding unpleasant reactions, this being touched on in more than one connection. All of them mentioned the importance to them of support from home although not all elaborated on this. However, values and attitudes to others, learnt at home, were mentioned by a few. On their own evidence but also supported by evidence from their parents and teachers, these students, as well as having good interpersonal skills, were all essentially socially self-confident, albeit three of them mentioned a certain shyness in some circumstances, but this in no way adversely effected their good relationships with peers.

It is interesting that all these students said they were also highly motivated, all but one very competitive, and six of them happy with the open recognition given to them for their achievements. These are all factors which could, in some schools or circumstance, result in negative responses to them. Very able students who work hard and win prizes can be targets of hostility in a culture where it is not 'cool' to be

bright, hard working and competitive (Eyre, 1997a; Subotnik 1998). These factors, which could work against them, clearly did not do so which underlines the part played by their basic personalities in promoting ease of relationships with others, but perhaps also the part played by awards systems which, as will be discussed later, did not generate hostile responses. Some of their comments on their schools' awards systems also indicate a sympathy with others who do not often win prizes, such comments being made for example by one of the two students who was not very comfortable with the open recognition of her many successes. Such sensitivity is unlikely to be confined to this issue alone and so it is not so surprising that these students related well to their peers. Freeman (1979) also noted such feelings of sympathy and empathy in her research group.

Four of the students who had no problems were also talented in various sporting activities and sports played an important part in their extra-curricular lives in and out of school. In three of these cases, all boys, sports formed the basis of their in-school friendship groups. It is interesting to speculate as to whether or not their high ability in some activity, which, as noted in the literature (Freeman, 1991; Painter, 1996), is more widely popular and generally culturally more acceptable than academic learning, had been a factor in the lack of negative responses to them. Do very able students therefore, and especially boys, *need* to be talented or at least very interested and participate in activities such as sports to make their high academic ability more acceptable to their less academically able peers?

All of the seven students who were targets of some level of negative responses had developed various strategies for coping with these, and, as noted earlier, had not allowed anything of this nature to affect their attitudes adversely. Of the four whose problems were regarded by them as relatively minor, one said that earlier in her career she liked being called 'boff' because it made her feel secure about her ability. Another took a similar attitude in saying that when people were nasty to him about his ability he took it as a compliment. It must take considerable strength of mind and a

very positive attitude to be able to turn unpleasantness to good account in this way and represents rather an unusual way of coping with such a problem. Three of them felt that other personality factors such as being tolerant of others and calm had also been important in dealing with any difficulties.

Of the three students who suffered most from negative responses two mentioned real nastiness in the comments made to them, in one case on a daily basis. It is interesting that the latter student was another whose friendship group was based on sport but this interest did not appear to have prevented negative responses to him. On the other hand, those responses might have been even more marked if the student had not participated in sports, but the student did not comment on this so any conclusions can only be speculative.

Like the other eight, all seven of these students gave the impression at interview of having strong personalities and this, as shown, emerged again amongst this group as being an important factor in coping with any negative responses. Furthermore, with only one exception they all said they had good interpersonal skills, relating well to their peers, this borne out by their parents and teachers. All indicated the importance to them of support from home and some mentioned support from school as helpful.

The evidence that they had coped very effectively was clear. They were all high achievers despite any difficulties, they had also remained highly motivated and six of them were academically competitive. There was, therefore, no evidence here of their becoming demoralised or feeling a need to hide or reject their ability. In spite of their problems and the hostile responses which could result from awards and open recognition of their achievements, they were all happy to receive these. However, two of those who had suffered most in this way emphasised that, while comfortable with the awards systems as they existed, they would not want any greater an emphasis on this, one making specific reference to possible hostile responses this could



generate. Some of these students showed the same concern noted above for those who did not receive many or any awards.

All of the students said that the awards systems in their schools were at the very least alright, and none suggested that these generated negative responses. All were happy to receive awards, including the two students who said they were uncomfortable in receiving the many awards they got. Even these students did not suggest that the practice should be discontinued, one saying she did like getting awards, the other that in spite of her embarrassment it made her feel proud. However, several students said they would not want an increase in the awards in their schools, one, as noted above, indicating that he was very aware that this could generate or increase negative responses. More parents than students also said they would not like to see an increase in the awards system. The awards system is also a part of the support given to the students, and reference to this will be made in that section.

The fact that all the students liked receiving awards and did not suggest that such a practice should be discontinued indicates that it was important to them, and they *needed* to have concrete recognition or open 'rewards' for their achievements, just like anyone else. They gave clear evidence in their comments that they regarded this as a need in others too. This need for rewards reflects the findings of Csizsentmihalyi et al., (1997), as noted in the literature, and had been met satisfactorily for them all by their schools' systems.

Only four students mentioned other small problems related to their high ability, all associated with the perceived adverse effects it could have on relationships. They felt that their high ability affected the way their peers responded to them, underlining the importance to them of their interpersonal relationships.

## **Social relationships**

Very able students are just like any others in that it is important to them to have friends, and especially they need to be members of a group of friends, with Monks and Boxtel (1995) noting that friendships and the peer group increased in importance quite markedly in adolescence. A respect and tolerance for those less able than themselves is also regarded by some writers and researchers as being important for various reasons already discussed in the literature section.

### ***Friendships***

All of the students were members of friendship groups that were to a greater or lesser extent mixed in ability and all said that this group membership was important to them. In all of the schools the tutor groups were mixed in ability and eight of the fifteen friendship groups were based on the tutor groups. Another four of the groups, all boys groups, were based on an interest/ability in sport, this having been discussed earlier. The remaining three were based on having general interests in common, including an interest in working hard. Contacts with these groups of friends extended beyond the school in all cases.

A majority of the students also had one or more special friends and a different picture emerged here in terms of ability of these best friends. Without exception they were students of comparable ability and while all were or had been originally in the same tutor group, six of the ten special friendships had pre-dated secondary school. Therefore, whatever the stage of commencement of the friendship, these students had been drawn to others of their own ability when it came to individual friendships, even though there was ample opportunity for them to have mixed ability friendships. The need for very able students to have contact with those of similar ability and interests is discussed further in the section on challenge and emerges in their preferences for ability groupings.

### *Working in different kinds of groups or independently*

In response to the idea of working alone or in small withdrawal groups as a means of making special provision for them, the students' reactions were very much as could have been expected and as outlined by writers and researchers on this subject. Even those who found either or both ideas acceptable, in general preferred to remain with their class group, albeit working independently within that. They gave all the characteristic reasons, such as possible negative responses, not wanting to be singled out or made to feel different, not wanting to be isolated or separated from friends and wanting to be 'normal' (Torrance, 1974; Marjoram, 1988).

Attitudes to mixing and working with others of similar and mixed ability and especially their attitudes to those less able than themselves or with learning difficulties were explored. As explained, all the students were in mixed ability tutor groups and all had had experience of working in mixed ability and ability groups at some stage. All could see the social advantages of working sometimes in mixed ability groups and comments about the importance of this were expressed, in some cases quite strongly. Ten students could also see advantages socially in ability groups. Three had a strong preference for these, all of whom were students who had been targets of negative responses, in two cases with quite marked problems here. Ability grouping, in drawing together the most able students from the whole year, had been important to these students. They had made it possible for them to meet other very able students in a way that would not have been possible if all lessons had been in mixed ability groups.

Perhaps understandably, seven of the students mentioned the academic advantages of being in ability groups, this issue re-emerging in the section on ability and interest contacts. The strongest endorsement of this came from one of the three students who could see no social advantages whatsoever in ability groups and explained the very definite academic disadvantages for someone like her in mixed

ability groupings. An objection to those who were disruptive was referred to by this and some of the other students in their comments on helping the less able, five of these significantly seeing academic advantages for them in ability grouping. Other social contacts with those of comparable ability came through extra-curricular activities in and out of school. This topic is continued in a later section.

The evidence which emerges from the students' responses, therefore, indicates that they felt it was important to them socially or it was a necessary part of their social experiences or a *need* to be in mixed ability groupings. However, a majority of them indicated that it was also important to them socially to be in ability groups sometimes, so this too could be regarded as a *need*. Their preference for ability groups for academic reasons was even more strongly stated by some of the students, and all this suggests that most of these students were best suited by or even for their social and academic comfort *needed* a system where both kinds of groupings were in existence. All the schools, as described, offered such a mixed system and could be said, therefore, to be meeting the students' needs in these matters, although some modifications of the systems would have been welcomed.

### *Responses to the less able*

One of the needs listed from the literature review is for the very able / gifted to learn tolerance of those less able than themselves (Hollingworth, cited in Gross, 1993).

The students' view of the less able as people of equal importance in society was endorsed in many of their comments, such as that of the student who said they had "just as much right to be respected for what they can do as anyone has". Although some of these students had reservations about those not willing to work, their attitudes and responses to students not so able as themselves, especially those with learning difficulties, were otherwise unequivocally positive, indicating sympathy and sensitivity towards them and a willingness to help them. It has been mentioned

earlier that with only one exception their interpersonal relationships with their peers were good, this endorsed by parents and teachers. If they did not respond well to the least able this could not have been so. Even the student who felt he needed to work at his relationships said he tried to help those less able and got on with them.

Therefore, any need for them to have tolerance and a respect for and appreciation of the worth of such students had been fulfilled. This was, perhaps, largely because of having pleasant and sympathetic personalities but also to a wish to relate well to *all* their peers and not to do anything which would promote antagonism, for all of which there was evidence in their comments. However, their comments also suggested that in terms of helping others, and therefore helping relationships, that this was an on-going need.

Many of the comments made above have indicated that the students needed to have good interpersonal relationships. Even the student who did not relate easily to everyone did have friends and did belong to a friendship group and expressed the importance of this to him. Equally those who said they were a little shy did not have any problems in relating well to their peers. Furthermore, as noted, three of the students said they related especially well to adults and possibly this represented a need in them for older company or company of comparable intellectual maturity. All but two of the students also felt they were strong in their leadership skills, one of these being the student who was working to improve his peer relationships. Two others said they had recognised in themselves an inclination to be too domineering and had learnt to be more diplomatic in their approach to leadership, which indicated the importance to them of having such skills. While not listed as a specific need in the very able, nevertheless, as noted in the literature section, good leadership skills in the very able are seen as important, especially in terms of their contribution to society through these (Van Tassel-Baska, 1993).

## Summary

My analysis has indicated that the students who were targets of negative attitudes had *needed* to develop strategies which allowed them to cope with this and also strategies to help to prevent consequent adverse effects on their achievement. They were characterised by strength of personality and good interpersonal skills and a very positive attitude to acceptance of their high ability. These and support at home and/or in school had been important to them in dealing with problems and, therefore, these too could be regarded as needs in this connection. This was underlined by those who had *not* suffered from negative responses and attributed this to all such factors.

Amongst both groups of students, comments were made indicating the students' awareness of possible negative responses to their high ability, and the kinds of actions, behaviour or attitudes which should be *avoided* in helping to prevent such hostility. *Avoiding tactics* could, therefore, be regarded as part of their coping skills for all these students. A strong interest and / or ability in sports could arguably be a need for some in helping their relationships and reducing hostility. All of the students' need for recognition of and rewards for their achievements was also highlighted in their comments, which was interesting considering that this could have generated hostile responses to them.

Membership of friendship groups was important to all fifteen students and these groups were all of mixed ability, eight of them being based on the mixed ability tutor groups. The importance of and *need* for ability friendships was underlined by some pupils in the pattern of their friendships with individuals and their enjoyment of contacts with those of comparable ability both socially and intellectually. The way in which the schools had grouped the students had, therefore, been an important element both in allowing / promoting mixed ability friendships and in helping to meet their particular needs in respect of ability contacts. The students also indicated strongly their need *not* to be singled out, set apart / isolated or made to feel different.

Without exception the students believed it was important to them socially to have contacts with average ability peers. Closely related to this, the need for very able students to learn tolerance of and respect for the less able was confirmed amongst these students. Without exception they had already achieved this, but in terms of maintaining their good relationships with all peers this was seen as important and so was an on-going need. Their need to 'give back', not only in the wider social context, but especially in terms of helping others, especially those less able, also emerged as an on-going need

Many of the issues mentioned have implications for good interpersonal skills, and this, as noted above, emerged with leadership skills as very important for them or a need in coping with most aspects of their high ability.

## **Support**

The importance of and need for support for very able students at home and in school, in both their social/ emotional and their academic/curricular lives, has been discussed in the literature section. The students in this study have endorsed this in some of their responses on issues already raised.

### **Support in school; home-school liaison; vocational guidance**

None of the schools had a member of staff specifically designated as a counsellor for the very able. However, well-structured pastoral support systems for both social and academic matters were in place in all the schools as described earlier. The schools made it clear that advice, guidance, support or help of any nature was available as needed, including for parents.

The students were confident of the positive responses they would receive, some from actual experiences, should they approach their teachers/schools if they were having problems of a social nature. The majority would have approached their

teachers / schools for support at some stage if in difficulty of this kind and several of them mentioned the kind of help they had been given. Their parents were also confident that the schools would support the students in this respect. Five of them made specific reference to ways in which the schools had given such help. One of these parents referred to the help given to the student in such terms as to imply that this contact had been of very great importance to the wellbeing of the student at the time. One other parent, not amongst the five mentioned, made the very interesting comment that the student *needed* to have a good relationship with a “key teacher”, preferably the form teacher. Social support, therefore, had been necessary and helpful to a number of the students in the study and readily available, and no student argued for or even suggested that he or she had ever felt a need for a counsellor specially designated for the very able or for a special mentor.

All the students paid tribute to the level of academic support given in their schools and all had benefited from this, a view endorsed by their parents. Some students indicated a specific need for this in various comments already quoted. It is clear from the remaining students’ comments that they depended on and used such support as was offered, and that it was important to them not just to have the support but also the security of knowing it was there. As discussed earlier, support was also given to the students through the schools’ awards systems which, even for those who were targets of hostility, provided a positive ethos and atmosphere in celebrating achievement and did not generate negative responses in the way they were structured. Home-school liaison was specifically mentioned as important to them by some students, and provision for this was good in all schools, in terms of reporting to parents including at ‘parents evenings’. Parents endorsed the importance they attached to the parents’ evenings by a full commitment to attendance at them and a request for an alternative interview when they could not attend. All felt they could approach schools outside these times if they had concerns about the students.



It was early in their careers to discuss the students' needs in vocational guidance. However, two of them thought that they would eventually have difficulty in deciding on a career area and would need help in this, which reflects the comments by Shore et al., (1991). Some preliminary work had been done in all the schools but the main careers advice programmes had not started and the remaining students did not have an idea of how much guidance they would eventually need.

### **Support in the home**

Without exception both the students and their teachers paid tribute to the unequivocal support they were given by their parents and home backgrounds generally, in both social and academic contexts and strong evidence of their close relationships with family was given by all fifteen students. This emerged as a major theme within the research project and reflects very much the findings, for example, of Freeman (1979). All indicated, albeit one rather obliquely, that when having social problems they would at some stage approach parents and/or an older sibling to discuss this or for support, and some had done so. They also made especially positive and rather more detailed responses on academic support, some including references to siblings and wider family. Help with work, encouragement to work hard and do well generally, being applauded when results were good, were all mentioned by these students, indicating that this had a marked effect on their motivation and achievement, since the question asked included a specific reference to the influence of the family/home background on motivation and achievement. The evidence is strong, therefore, that support generally in the home, including from the wider family, was very important and arguably the students needed this, especially those with problems, but also for maintaining motivation and thereby their high levels of achievement in many of them. An unlooked for theme which emerged here was that of the influence of the in-family role-model, especially the sibling rival/ role-model. Some reference to role-models has been found in the literature on gifted children, but mostly in terms

of parent or other adult role-models (Pringle, 1970; Kunkle et al.,1992). The impact of the older sibling rival / role-model is not noted and there appears to be no original research on this. Five students mentioned older very able siblings who were high achievers and who had influenced them. Some of these students commented at some length about wanting to do as well as their older able siblings, suggesting this was a very real ambition or target for them. Three more students mentioned other wider family rivals/ role-models and also referred to their positive influence on their lives, especially on their achievement and ambitions.

It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which having a role-model might be regarded as a *need* for these students. It is impossible to assess whether or not they would have done so well had there been no such role-models / rivals. It can be said, however, that for more than half of these students they had an important positive influence on their motivation and thereby seemed likely to affect their ultimate levels of achievement.

The absence of too much pressure represented by the extent to which the students felt they had enough time to themselves and to pursue interests, was explored as a part of support. Four did feel pressured by work but the rest were essentially happy in this respect although some with qualification, several referring to the limitations and problems created by the homework load, with the parents of one making this point very strongly.

The desire to have more time to themselves to read was expressed by five of the students their comments indicating that reading was important to them. A keen interest in reading is one of the recognised characteristics of very able students, so these responses were very interesting. There is clear indication in the comments of some students that they saw a reduction in the homework load as a means of allowing them more time to themselves. This would have been difficult for schools to achieve where students were fast approaching public examinations. Only two mentioned some minor parental pressure, not referring to this as a real problem for them. The

rest of the students were not, however, unduly pressured, and those who were, for example, sports enthusiasts or musicians said they had enough time for practising these skills, with some being good at time management by their own evidence and that of their teachers and parents.

### **Summary**

Good school support systems, both social and academic, were important / necessary for all these students and there was good provision to meet their needs in this regard. Support in terms of vocational guidance did not emerge as a need for these students at this stage. Good home-school liaison was also specifically noted as important to them by some students. Any needs in this respect were, therefore, being met by schools.

The importance and impact of general support from home was a very high profile issue amongst this group of students. Their comments left no doubt as to their need for this together with the importance for several of them of having in-family role-models / rivals, and especially older siblings, in terms of their motivation and achievement. Time to themselves to relax and pursue their own interests / practise their skills and not to be over pressured also emerged as a need for this group of students.

## **ACADEMIC AND CURRICULAR NEEDS**

### **A Good General Education**

A good general education and not pursuing areas of special interest at the expense of other areas is seen as an important need of the very able (HMI 1977).

All their schools offered the students a balanced curriculum. The students regarded it as important not to neglect any of their current subject areas, and at the

time of the research none felt he/she was doing so, although one student felt some subjects were marginally worth more attention than others. Several indicated that in earlier years some they had given some subjects less attention of others, for a number of reasons, including that these were subjects not being taken in the GCSE examinations. From this and other comments made it was evident that the importance to some of these students of not neglecting subjects was of a very practical nature.

### **Challenge**

As discussed in the literature, challenge of an appropriate nature is regarded by writers and researchers as being a very important academic / curricular need of the very able and the challenge offered to them in various relevant areas was explored with the students.

A lack of challenge was not a major problem or complaint with any of the students. The majority of them felt that they were being sufficiently challenged most of the time, although some with slight reservations. Four felt that they were not fully challenged, but this did not apply to all of their curriculum all of the time.

Students who are not sufficiently challenged or for whom the challenge is inappropriate often suffer from boredom (Tempest, 1974; Painter, 1989). Altogether nine students referred to being bored occasionally, but in no case was this a serious problem. Interesting reasons were given for their boredom by some of them, very characteristic of the frustrations recorded in the literature section as being suffered by very able students generally, including unnecessary repetition of work and too slow a pace. One of the reasons most often given either directly or by strong implication was teaching styles, as in the teacher “droning on” or “dragging on”, and when “they keep going on and on about it”. The importance of liking the teacher in the students’ attitude and response to a subject was mentioned by two of the students. Implicit in all this is that amongst these students it was important to them not to be bored /

frustrated by inappropriate challenge, and that they appreciated / needed teachers to whom they could relate positively and whose teaching styles allowed them to be *appropriately* challenged.

Insofar as lack of challenge was not mentioned by any student as a serious or inhibiting problem, neither was this noted as such in the views of either parents or teachers. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the teachers in their schools were mostly providing sufficient challenge and of an appropriate nature, with some specific references to examples of this so that the needs of the students in terms of challenge were, to an extent, being met. However, the comments in the next section on intellectual independence suggest areas where there were some gaps.

### **Contacts with others of similar abilities and interests**

Contacts of this nature are regarded as an important need for the very able (Leyden, 1985; Wallace, 1983a). Reference has already been made to some students' choice of friends of similar ability, and preference for ability groupings for lessons and, in a few cases, for social as well as academic reasons. The principal ways in which most of the students came into contact with those of comparable ability were in lessons where they were in ability groups in school. Extra-curricular activities both in and out of school involved some contact with those of similar ability, but the principal contacts through these were with those of similar interests.

All of the students valued both these kinds of contacts and regarded them as important. Many of their mixed ability friendship groups were based on common interests which underlined the importance of this to them. Three students said they would have liked to have more contacts with those of comparable ability mainly by being in more ability groups and one of these indicated that more ability groups would mean she would waste less time "waiting", which is not a very challenging exercise. Eight other students, while not saying they wanted more of these contacts, nevertheless referred earlier to the academic advantages of being in groups where they

were with others of similar ability. These eleven students said that they felt being in such groups offered them advantages such as a faster pace, more competition, less disruptive behaviour and generally greater intellectual challenge. This indicated the importance to the students of the challenge of being in such groups and a need for them to be in ability groupings for at least a good proportion of their time.

In general eleven of the students were happy with the opportunities for and amount of contacts with those of similar interests and ability, with two of these making the interesting comments that contacts with those of comparable interests were more important to them than with those of similar ability, although one nevertheless appreciated the extra challenge of being in ability groups. This implied need for a balance in their academic and more social contacts as represented by their interests is touched on by one of the student's parents who expressed a concern that this should be so.

### **Opportunity to discover new abilities and interests and to pursue existing interests.**

The need to provide such opportunities is supported, for example, by Freeman (1998). All schools offered programmes of extra-curricular activities including opportunities to participate in new and existing activities and interests outside the classroom and so to discover previously unrecognised abilities, and to discover a measure of the extent of their abilities. All the students had to some degree taken advantage of these. Such opportunities provided by the schools but also opportunities in the community allowed four students to discover unrecognised abilities and, including these, altogether nine students discovered new interests. A number of these emphasised that rather than the discovery of a new ability, the elements of challenge and enjoyment and the discovery of a new interest made them want to pursue these further.

The discoveries of these new interests and abilities had been important for those involved. Had the opportunities not been provided they would not have discovered these abilities, perhaps until a lot later, perhaps never, and so these particular students had *needed* such opportunities. From the above comments it could be argued that there is also a need for students to *enjoy* activities in which they participate. This would ensure that they continue to pursue them and persevere with the challenges and have a real chance to discover if they have do have an ability in a given area. As noted in the literature many or maybe most skills need much practice and patience before they are mastered, especially to a high level of performance (Howe, 1995). Some of the students led very full lives after school hours, pursuing their various special interests and indicating that these opportunities were also very important to them. In some cases these activities formed quite a major part of their lives.

### **Coping with failure**

As discussed in the literature, a fear of failure can be quite a strong emotion in some very able students (Leyden, 1985), and it is believed that these students need to learn to cope with failure, otherwise they will never want to accept new or very difficult challenges and this could inhibit them from discovering or achieving their true potential. A fear of failure was not a major problem for any of the fifteen students in the study. Ten had some general or specific fears, for example, two of not succeeding in their GCSE examinations and another two of adverse peer reaction. However, nine of the fifteen students said they would feel some upset or embarrassment in failure.

In none of these cases would anticipated embarrassment / upset or their different fears affect any of them to the extent that it was intellectually inhibiting, preventing the students from wanting to accept really difficult challenges, and this was endorsed by their parents and teachers. There was only one student who had this

kind of fear of failure, but even here it was only in respect of a particular GCSE subject, which consequently she did not intend to take in the exam. Their willingness to accept new intellectual challenges was evidenced in their responses on using alternative approaches to problem solving as in creative thinking. Most of the students were willing to take such intellectual risks, and did not appear to be inhibited by any fear of failing in their attempts, five of those concerned being students who did have some small fear of failure.

These students were, therefore, generally coping well with any fears or worries about failure and two of them made most interesting and unexpected comments related to this issue. One of those who had never failed said she thought that it was important “to be allowed to make mistakes”, that this helps you to handle failure. Another, who had some fear regarding GCSE failure, made the observation that it is good to have some disappointments and to slip up “it makes you more human really”. For fourteen-year-old students these seem to be very mature attitudes and the latter comment touches on the idea that a humbling experience is good for such students.

It could not be argued, therefore, that the students needed at this stage to learn how to handle and live with failure, but strategies for this must have been learnt at some stage, otherwise they would not have been so well equipped to deal with their fears, however small.

Since the two issues are so intimately related, the willingness of the students to accept difficult challenges in their learning and how they would respond generally to finding something they were learning difficult to understand was explored alongside their fear of failure. Their responses in this underlined their considerable intellectual independence. However, all would have been prepared to ask for help if necessary from teachers and some from parents but also some from peers, therefore having no fear of admitting a difficulty in understanding. This paid tribute to their willingness to admit their ‘failure’ to cope with some part of their learning, which



endorses their comments on not having a serious problem in this respect. In some cases it also paid tribute to their relationships with some of their peers and indicated a confidence that they would receive a positive rather than a derisive response from them.

Rote learning was discussed too, since it is possible that very able students, with their characteristic remarkable memories, if they have real difficulty in understanding something, will learn material by rote and without understanding. This could, in part, be a response to not wanting to ask for help and admit their failure to understand. A very interesting and unexpected picture emerged here from some of the students' responses, five of whom had found that, when they had done this in the past, understanding came later, with application, indicating that these students did not always need to understand new material and that rote learning did have a place for them in certain circumstances. However, the need to understand was underlined by the comments of those eight students who emphasised that they would never use the rote learning strategy and was also indicated by those who would rote learn as a last resort.

## **Summary**

The students generally felt it was important not to neglect any subject areas and indicated that they believed a good balance in the curriculum was important, with their schools all meeting this need.

While most of the students felt they were being challenged adequately, boredom and various other factors which led to inappropriate challenge were mentioned by several students. An adequate and appropriate challenge was important and *necessary* to them. No student in this group had a major or inhibiting fear of failure which might prevent them from meeting such challenges. These students therefore did not *need* at this stage to learn strategies for coping with failure, Most of the students also indicated that it was very important to them to meet the challenge of

learning with understanding and would never rote learn. For some others this had worked as a temporary strategy.

Some students had found new interests and abilities with their associated challenges, directly through using the opportunities for this created for them by their schools. They had needed the opportunities offered for these discoveries. Many also *needed* the opportunities provided for them by the community to pursue their many out of school interests and to help them to discover the extent of their abilities. Contacts with those of similar interests and ability were also important to all the students.

### **Intellectual Independence**

Very able students are seen as having a need to be *encouraged* and given the *opportunity* to be independent and imaginative in their approach to their learning, and to be flexible and use their different learning and thinking styles and strategies (Shore et al., 1991; Wallace 2000a). There are several related needs which underpin this broad area of need and these are also discussed. Although information was being sought on the students' needs in relation to intellectual independence, part of the objective of some the questions in this section was to discover whether or not the students' perceived needs in terms of encouragement and opportunity to develop their intellectual independence and imagination were being satisfied. The students' responses on their preferences in relation to their approach to new learning, attitudes to independent research, and on pace of working / learning will be discussed first, together with their perceptions of their schools' attitudes and responses to these.

The students' independence in relation to finding something they were learning very difficult to understand has been discussed in the last section. Here they were asked how they approached learning something new and their comments indicated the same independence in this but with some variation, in that here seven of

the students liked to have some initial guidance before then tackling their learning independently. The others preferred to tackle it first on their own, but would have approached their teachers if help was needed. The variations in their learning styles were, therefore, evident in their responses, not just in their preferences in initial approach, but in some wanting the whole picture before tackling the parts, and some liking to explore and discuss ideas with others. The students' independence in their approach to their learning was also reflected in their enjoyment of doing their own research, with only one student saying she did not really like this activity. This will be discussed further in relation to study skills.

Parents' and teachers' responses fully supported the students' comments on their independence in their approach to learning and the students said that this high level of independence in their learning was important to them. Their comments indicated that they were, with one possible exception, being allowed to use their own styles / strategies and that the teaching styles were flexible, including catering for the wholistic learners. Therefore their need for independence in this aspect of their learning was being met by their schools, where they said that, in varying degrees, an independent approach was encouraged. Any need for learning support was also being met by their teachers and the students' comments indicated that they never doubted they would be given this support.

## **Pace**

The students' responses on pace of learning indicated that just over half of them preferred a fast pace of working and it was important to them to be allowed to work quickly when necessary. Even those who had no strong preference indicated that working at a fast pace, when appropriate, was important to them too, with reference to the boredom or dislike of repeating work already understood, this inevitably slowing the pace for them. However, these students and some of those who preferred working quickly also indicated that a slower pace was sometimes

needed, for example, to learn new concepts, for subjects or topics not so readily understood and to avoid “skimming over the top” in subjects. All of these were prepared to do in-depth work when required without being pressured. Three of the students said that they actually had a preference for a slower pace and a chance to consolidate work by careful checking and ensuring it was understood. This highlights the point made in the literature regarding the need for gifted / very able to be allowed to work at their *own* pace rather than a fast pace being underlined (Tilsley 1981).

It seems fair to conclude that those students who had a preference for a fast pace of working, either all or part of the time, *needed* this to avoid the boredom generated by a slow pace. However, for some students a slower pace was *necessary* for them to do the in-depth work which they liked, so that flexibility too could be regarded as a *need*. All but one student said there was flexibility in their schools in allowing them to work at their preferred pace, so here again they indicated that their needs in this respect were generally being met, maintaining their intellectual independence.

### **Opportunities and encouragement to be independent and imaginative in other approaches to learning**

The students’ perceptions of how the schools would respond to the various other perceived learning needs of very able students were explored through questions on several hypothetical situations involving the use of various learning and thinking styles, skills and strategies. Their responses also gave an indication of the extent to which they had tried such strategies and needed opportunities and encouragement to do so.

As discussed in the literature, the gifted / very able are regarded as having a need to be encouraged to develop and use their creativity (Wallace,1983a; Freeman1995b). The students were given an explanation of the term creative

thinking with a possible example of where they might have an opportunity to employ such thinking. They had never been tested in this ability and their answers were not based on very solid foundations. However, they seemed to grasp the basic principle and gave some interesting responses. Twelve of the fifteen said they were capable of seeing alternative and imaginative methods of tackling set problems and some had tried these with varying degrees of success and some enjoyment. Their teachers' strong endorsement of these students' comments on this issue were especially valuable since they were so well placed to judge this and understood the concept without explanation.

However three of the students had never actually tried this approach, with some of these saying it would not be a usual response for them to look for alternatives in problem solving. These students and arguably some of the other students, whose attempts at this had been somewhat tentative, would have needed positive / proactive encouragement to use such approaches in their learning. All the students said that they believed or knew they would get encouragement in their schools, in varying degrees, to use the alternative approach to problem solving. Most indicated actual experiences of such responses when they tried this, with some of these indicating that their schools promoted such an approach as well as responding positively to its use. Therefore while some of the students' needs to be encouraged in this were being met, others needed more of such encouragement.

Only two students were unsure of the likely response to presenting work in an unusual format. The remainder felt that this would be acceptable and in some cases that their teachers would be pleased. Only two had actual experience of trying this approach and from their experience knew there would be a warm response to such an initiative. This is essentially a matter of seeing an alternative approach as in creative thinking and the students' responses on these two issues corresponded quite well, with the implication even stronger that, since so few had tried this approach, the students

again here needed to be proactively encouraged to use such learning strategies and styles, with opportunities to do so.

Using knowledge in new and different ways comes into the same category and on this issue there were two students who felt, perhaps from some related experience, that response to a request to do this would not be positive. The remainder felt or knew they would be allowed to work in this way but that the willingness to allow this would again depend on the teacher concerned. Three students had had experience of positive encouragement by their teachers to approach work in this way and two others felt the request to do this would be very warmly received. However, the majority had not tried such strategies and again here possibly needed more positive encouragement to do so, with specific opportunities for this given as extension work in lesson time for those who can complete work quickly and would or should have time to use such learning strategies.

The students believed that if they finished all set work early and wanted to study something of their own special interest or a new interest, in all but two cases they would, in general, be met with positive responses from their teachers, although some felt that this would, to an extent, depend on the teacher concerned. However, only one of them had tried this, perhaps because, as several mentioned, there was always so much to do that there was very little likelihood of such an opportunity ever arising. It could be argued, therefore, that these students needed to be given positive encouragement to pursue a newly discovered or an existing interest but also to be given the *opportunity* to do so as a part of extension work provided for the very able in the classroom.

Therefore, in the students' responses on using different learning and thinking styles and strategies, there was some evidence that a more proactive approach in this could have been taken in encouraging the students to vary these as outlined, with opportunity to do so. All of this is a part of the challenge offered to students as well as a matter of independence. However, this does not imply that the students did not

use various different styles and strategies in their learning, for much evidence of their individuality and independence in this respect had been given in other contexts. In response to a general question on intellectual independence all of the students said that this was important to them, and this was corroborated by their responses on many of the topics discussed here. In their comments on all the above issues most of the students indicated that if or when they had wanted to use various different strategies and approaches in their learning, such approaches would not only be welcomed but positively encouraged by some of their teachers. However, there were many comments throughout the various topics that responses would depend on the teachers concerned. Confirming these views, the same observations were made when the students were asked about their schools' attitudes generally to intellectual independence.

It was noted in Chapter XI that twelve students, representing all five schools, gave a consistently or mostly positive picture of their schools' encouragement to them to be imaginative and independent in their work. The other three gave a mixed picture, mentioning at least one area where they felt they would not get such a positive response. These three were all in different schools. In referring to the flexibility in allowing them to be independent in their work, the comments that this would depend on the teachers concerned were also spread across the schools. Once again here the different students' experiences within the same school seem to have given them varying perceptions of their school's / teachers' attitudes in this area. However, it should be emphasised that the all over picture given of the schools' actual or perceived responses was positive. The same general positive picture was given by both their parents and their teachers and again no school was portrayed as either completely positive or completely negative in allowing / encouraging or promoting independence, imagination and different styles in the students' learning and thinking.

The conclusion suggested by these responses is that, while some teachers were making very definite efforts to meet the needs of these students in encouraging them

to be independent and imaginative in their learning, there was no consistent commitment by all teachers in the five schools to making special provision for these particular perceived learning needs of the very able. It is interesting that the very objective responses of some of the students' teachers themselves confirmed this conclusion, since a number made similar observations. Parents' comments also added considerable weight to the students' views and to the conclusion drawn. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the general picture presented by the students, parents and teachers was a positive one.

### **Study skills and habits; research**

Study skills, including research skills, and study habits were discussed as a part of intellectual independence and the students, without exception, said they thought good study skills and habits were important for them and so such skills could be regarded as one of their *needs*. Responses on the advice given to them by their schools offered a further confirmation of their strong intellectual independence. Few had sought advice on this and none from their schools and this was confirmed by their teachers. Their organisation of their private study and exam revision further confirmed their independence with some describing highly individual strategies they had developed for this, showing an interesting awareness of the learning styles which suited them best. There was a good correspondence in the views of their parents on this issue, teachers not having been invited to comment. The enjoyment of the majority in doing research, as noted earlier, further reflected this independence in their study skills and habits.

All of the schools offered some level of study skills advice, some as a structured programme, so there was a clear attempt to meet any needs in this connection. Some students appreciated their school's approach in encouraging them to work out strategies which best suited them, that is further encouragement to be independent.



## Summary

All of the students indicated in their responses that being or being allowed to be independent in their learning generally was very important to them. The help available from their teachers was also important to them and they indicated that at times they *needed* this. Their needs in all these respects were being met by their schools / teachers.

Just over half of the students preferred a fast pace of working either all or part of the time. It was clear that they *needed* this to avoid the boredom generated by too slow a pace. A few *needed* a slower pace. Their needs were, therefore, somewhat mixed and they indicated that it was important / *necessary* to them to be allowed to work at their *own* pace, whatever this might be. In general this need was being met in their schools.

Many of the students were capable of and some had expressed an enjoyment of using alternative / creative approaches to problem-solving, this suggesting that it was important for them to be able to work in this way. Several of them indicated that their teachers promoted as well as responded positively to the use of such strategies. However, a number of the students did not use such approaches and needed proactive encouragement and opportunity to do so, as well as to present their work in an unusual format, use their work in new and different ways and pursue existing and new interests in the classroom.

All the students said they believed good study skills and habits were important, and these could therefore be regarded as a need for them, and perhaps an especially urgent need with the approach of their GCSE examinations.

## List of Needs

The needs of these fifteen students, as shown through the importance of these issues to them or suggested in other ways, have been summarised in a list similar to

that of the perceived needs as drawn from the literature. This is included at the end of the chapter as Table X.

**Table X : The Educational Needs of the Students Involved in the Research**

**Social and Emotional Needs**

**I To be socially integrated and to feel a part of society through:**

- An awareness, understanding and acceptance of their high ability, its implications and consequences and coping with these by having:
  - (i) examination / test results or other quantitative evidence of high ability
  - (ii) skills for coping with and/or avoiding negative responses from peers including:
    - good interpersonal and leadership skills with a **strong personality**
    - having a tolerance / sympathy for and a willingness to help others
    - understanding their good fortune / *a positive attitude to their high ability*
    - \* a strong interest / ability in sporting activities*
- Contacts with age-peers of average / varying abilities
- Contacts with those of comparable ability
- **Organisational systems which give opportunities for both**
- Membership of a friendship group
- Not being singled out set apart, isolated or made to feel different; being allowed to feel 'normal'
- Accepting that their gifts carry with them obligations to society

**II To have a support system as in having:**

- A good, well-structured pastoral support system.
- Awards / rewards for achievement in an atmosphere where this is celebrated by an appropriate system, which does not cause embarrassment / hostility
- Good home – school liaison
- A supportive home background
- Role-models and especially *\* sibling role-models / rivals*
- Time to relax and pursue interests and practise skills; not to be over-pressured

**Table X Continued: Academic and Curricular Needs**

**I To have a good general education through:**

- A balanced curriculum, with no area neglected

**II To be challenged and thereby to be kept motivated by:**

- Support and help in their learning in school and at home
- A sufficient and appropriate challenge in all areas of ability
- Learning with understanding with \* *rote learning as a temporary measure*
- Opportunities to discover the full range of their abilities through pursuing new interests and abilities
- Contacts with those of similar interests and abilities

**V Independence in their study and in their thinking and learning through:**

- Opportunity and/or encouragement to be independent and imaginative generally in their approach to their work and in the use of their own learning styles
- Working at their own pace
- Being proactively encouraged to use new or alternative learning styles/ approaches in their work as in using their creative thinking skills; being encouraged to pursue new and existing special interests in the classroom
- **Provision of opportunities generally for extension work, especially in the classroom**
- Good study and research skills and habits

Key: \* = a few students; **bold** = needs not on original list or with a different emphasis;

*italics* = speculative need

## **CHAPTER XIII**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The objective of the research was to assess the extent to which the educational needs of the group of fifteen very able students who took part in the study corresponded with the perceived needs of such students as drawn from the literature. In making a final summary of the findings of this project the validity and reliability of the data provided by the responses of the students is assessed first. This is followed by a discussion of the correspondence of the perceived needs of the gifted with those which emerged as the needs of the research group, with comments on areas which would be interesting for future research. There is also a discussion of the extent to which the needs of these students had been met by their schools. There is then a consideration of the extent to which the needs in the lists are particular to the gifted as opposed to being needs of all children, followed by final comments.

#### **Validity and Reliability of Findings**

The principal objective in collecting information from parents and teachers was to give validity to the students' responses and allow a judgement as to their reliability. On many of the important issues there was a very good correspondence in the comments and views of the three groups. In the areas where this was not so the reason suggested was that these could be issues which either or both parents' and teachers' views could have been based on opinion rather than discussion or first-hand observation. Therefore, in general, the views of the parents and teachers did indicate a reliability in the students' responses but also generated much useful and interesting data of value to the research.

### **Correspondence in the Lists of Needs**

In general, the level of correspondence between the list of perceived needs as drawn from the literature and the needs that emerged for this group of students is very good. There are small variations in the wording or the grouping of the needs according to how they emerged from this research and for these students, but where the essential essence of the needs is similar to those on the original list, this is regarded as a correspondence of those needs. It should be emphasised, however, that in the list of needs compiled for these students not all of the students indicated that they had all of these needs. Equally, however, there was no suggestion that the perceived needs as listed were needs of *every* very able student or that every able student had *all* these needs.

It is necessary here only to highlight two groups of needs, one being those needs on the original list which were not confirmed as such for the students in this research. The other group is those needs that emerged which are not on the original list or which require a special or different emphasis.

#### **Needs not confirmed**

There were only four needs on the original list which did not emerge as needs for at least some of the students. Learning to cope with failure is regarded as an important perceived need for very able students but was not a need for any members of this group. If they had ever had this need it had been realised, for none of them had problems in coping with any small fears they had. Neither a counsellor especially designated for the very able nor a special mentor for any of these students emerged as needs, and vocational guidance also was not a need for the group as a whole at this relatively early stage.

### **New needs or those needing emphasis or a different emphasis**

Of the needs which emerged which were not on the original list, an unexpected issue was the need for several of the students to have verification of their ability through test or examination results. This indicated the importance to them of some form of quantitative evidence before being willing to accept their 'giftedness'.

Several 'new' issues emerged related to the students' social needs and especially related to their need for coping skills in dealing with negative responses from peers. As well as needing skills for coping with such attitudes, strategies for avoiding these were also very important, dominant amongst these being good interpersonal skills, with an awareness of actions and attitudes which could generate hostility. As indicated above, helping others emerged as an important part of these interpersonal skills and especially, although not exclusively, those with learning difficulties. The need for good interpersonal skills was touched on in the literature, but it emerged for these students as quite a high profile issue.

All of the students indicated that they did have a positive attitude to their high ability, generally seeing it as being advantageous and being comfortable with it. For those who were targets of negative responses the conclusion reached was that, since they had not allowed this to demoralise or demotivate them or make them want to reject or hide their ability, that such a positive attitude had been important in coping with hostile attitudes. Reference to this was not found in the literature in any connection and in this research it was seen only as a strongly implied need and therefore open to challenge.

An unexpected issue to emerge in relation to four students was the possible part played by having an active interest and ability in sporting activities, especially amongst boys, in reducing hostile responses to the high intellectual ability of the

‘clever’ student. The idea of a need for such a combination in helping deflect negative responses can only be speculative, since there was no definite evidence of this from the students concerned. Furthermore, there was one student for whom this combination did not appear to have deflected negative responses, although it might have reduced them. However, there are two very interesting issues here for further research. One is this part played by socially acceptable and popular interests and pursuits, especially sports, in peer acceptance and tolerance of very high intellectual ability and the other is the extent to which this is gender-related. Each in itself could be the basis of a whole study with much to contribute to the question of strategies for the very able in coping with negative responses to their high ability.

The way in which the schools had grouped the students for both tutorial purposes and for lessons, in both ability and mixed ability groupings, had played an important part in giving the students opportunities for working with and making friends with those of any level of ability. A system which allowed such opportunities emerged as important to this group of students in their friendships and relationships with all their peers, with many of their friendships being based on their tutor groups. This was not a need which appeared as such in the literature discussion, only by implication in the suggestion that very able students need contacts with those of both similar and mixed ability. This could be another interesting area for further research.

Another new issue to emerge was that of the sibling role-model / rival, with several students making a direct reference to the effect of these on their levels of motivation and achievements. While there was reference to role-models in the literature, siblings were not especially mentioned in this context. This is an especially interesting outcome of this study and is another area which could be researched in depth and important, not only to the very able, but to all students in the achievement of their potential.



One of the other outcomes that was unexpected was the useful part played by rote learning for some students and something therefore not to be totally discouraged, as a temporary measure, where material is very difficult to comprehend. This aspect of such a strategy was not mentioned in the literature.

Provision of opportunities generally for extension work for the very able, especially in the classroom, was not listed as a specific need in the original list, although strongly implied in their need for appropriate challenge and highlighted in the chapter on provision. However, it emerged from the students' comments that, to an extent, a number of them were under-using some easily accessed learning strategies / variations in learning styles, considered useful for all but especially for very able students. While some of their teachers were making very positive efforts to encourage them in this, adequate, consistent opportunities were needed, with proactive encouragement to use varying approaches in their learning. Such opportunities could be offered in a well planned programme of enrichment / extension work for the very able, and while this does not come into the category of a new or different need, I feel it was important for *this* group to the extent of being specifically listed.

### **Meeting the students' needs**

The extent to which their schools were meeting the students' needs has been discussed in detail. The very broad picture is that, in general, their needs were being met very well in both the social and general academic support context. Some of their teachers also had a very positive approach to making appropriate curricular provision for them in terms of challenge, and in giving them encouragement and opportunity to be independent in their approach to their work. However, there were some gaps particularly in meeting these latter curricular needs, largely because the individual teachers' responses / approaches in every school varied. Ways and means of helping

those teachers who would like to meet the needs of the very able but are uncertain of how to approach this should be addressed.

### **Needs of the Gifted or Needs of All Children?**

As has been shown there is a marked although not total correspondence in the list of perceived needs of the gifted / very able and the needs of the group of students who took part in this research. Some discussion is appropriate at this point as to whether or not the needs in both lists are the particular needs of the very able / gifted or could be regarded as the educational needs of all children.

This issue has been raised in Chapter IV (p.45). Here comment is made to the effect that a number of the needs discussed are indeed the needs of all children, but amongst the gifted these can be intensified, and also, bearing in mind attitudes to the gifted and to helping them, these needs should be underlined. The lists of needs as stated in summary, however, require some elaboration in explanation of how the needs apply in particular to the gifted, including gifted underachievers, as opposed to all children / students. To illustrate the point a selection of the needs listed will be discussed following the format used in the lists.

Considering first social and emotional needs, comments are made in Chapter XII and in the literature, indicating that one of the major implications of giftedness is the negative attitudes of peers, especially to those of high intellectual ability and the gifted need skills for coping with such attitudes. While this may be a need amongst certain other groups or individuals who are subject to hostile responses for all sorts of reasons, generally it not a need for the majority of their average classmates, who are not so able and who can be quite resentful of those who are. There is evidence of this need in the comments of a number of the students involved in this research. Coping

skills for dealing with negative responses to their high ability could, therefore, be fairly regarded as a particular need of the gifted. Having strong personalities, good interpersonal skills, consideration for and tolerance of those less able, high motivation and, arguably, positive attitudes to their ability are all a part of these skills, as shown within the research group.

As noted in the literature, being a member of a group is important to all, but membership of a friendship group, or simply of the peer group generally, is especially important to the gifted who sometimes, especially if exceptionally able, can find it difficult to make friends amongst their peers. In addition, they feel 'different' and do not want this exacerbated by being isolated, or having special attention drawn to them or being separated from the class / peer group *because of their high ability*. Again this is discussed in the literature section. Although none of the students involved in the research had such problems, nevertheless the great importance to them of friendship groups and of not being separated or isolated from their class groups was made clear. They made comments to the effect that separation for special provision for high ability could result in hostile responses and / or affect friendships. Group membership, as noted, is important to all, but the issue of difficulty in friendships because of high ability does not arise amongst the average majority of children. They are not separated out for special lessons or otherwise isolated because of high ability and therefore this need as a consequence of their ability does not arise.

Contact with groups of age peers of varying or mixed ability is again important for all socially. However, whereas for the majority this means coming into contact with peers of both greater and lesser ability, for the gifted this means in particular mixing with those of less ability than themselves, including the least able. Reasons have been given for their particular need in this regard and the research group, without exception, endorsed the importance of this for them. In schools where

all lessons are grouped by ability this need should be taken into account in ensuring there are some opportunities for meeting in mixed ability groups.

Both social and academic support are also important for all children. Social / emotional support both at school and in the home is especially important to those who suffer from hostile responses, and who find it difficult to cope with this, such as some gifted pupils. Academic support is particularly important for gifted pupils for whom some teachers or schools find it difficult or impossible to make appropriate provision. In such cases support in the home, such as provision of resources, making full use of enrichment facilities in the community and support and encouragement for the development of their special talents is a particular need of the gifted if they are to have any hope of realising their potential. Since the basic school core curriculum is not designed for the gifted, but essentially for those of a more average spread of ability, this need is much more urgent for them than for their average ability classmates.

Support can also be given to the gifted both socially and academically in creating a school ethos and atmosphere that minimises hostile attitudes to academic achievement by their less able peers and which recognises, celebrates and rewards their achievement. All children need rewards for achievement, but, as pointed out earlier and confirmed by the comments of one of the research group in particular, it is sometimes assumed that the very able find high achievement easy, they do not have to work especially hard for this and presumably, therefore, need little if any praise or 'reward' for this. While this is, therefore, not a need particular to the gifted, nevertheless such rewards are important to them, as all those in the research group confirmed, and it should therefore be underlined that they too have this need. Rewards in the form of praise are also needed by the gifted for tackling difficult work and not having a satisfactory outcome for their efforts. This will encourage them to take intellectual risks. Unlike the average pupil, the gifted child rarely fails and

many fear this to the extent of being unwilling to take such intellectual risks and therefore never discovering the full extent of their abilities, which is another form of underachievement. This is therefore a need for the gifted which should be underlined and appropriate support should be available in the classroom for them.

Gifted underachievers are sometimes deliberately hiding their ability because they do not want to be recognised as 'clever', fearing the possible implications of this in terms of hostile responses or exclusion from the peer / friendship group because of their high ability. The problems of such students have been referred to in Chapter IV. They especially need both emotional and academic support to help them to overcome their fears, come to terms with their giftedness and realise their potential.

In terms of their curricular needs, all children need a balanced curriculum, but the gifted could possibly have an inclination to develop areas of special ability / giftedness at the expense of other areas and so this need for balance for them must be emphasised. All children also need an appropriate challenge as mentioned above, but while the normal school curriculum should satisfy this for the 'average' pupil, it is unlikely to do so for the gifted, who learn quickly and easily and understand and remember what they have been taught, usually with little or no repetition. As discussed in the literature, they can cope with more complex concepts and mental processes and a faster pace than the average pupil. To make them work at the pace and level of the average is not providing them with adequate challenge or the opportunity to realise their considerable potential.

These students need a special kind of appropriate challenge which involves, for example, using higher order thinking skills and problem-solving skills at a level of which others may not be capable. Much repetition, which is usually important for the average pupil to ensure skills have been adequately learnt, is not necessary for the gifted for reasons given. Well designed lesson plans should include special enrichment / extension work for the gifted which allows addition of breadth and / or

depth to the topics planned for the core studies or the 'average' class group. Provision for them in this respect should not be ad hoc or bolt-on, or unplanned, unstructured extra work which is rarely supervised or evaluated with or without the pupil. Lack of adequate challenge causes boredom and possibly underachievement and / or disruptive behaviour. This was not a major problem for anyone in the research group but there were comments about boredom and its causes, which bear out the above comments. Making the special work designed for the very able available to all pupils who have completed the core work and wish to try some of the enrichment / extension activities is an important way of discovering hitherto unrecognised abilities and possible gifted underachievers. So for the latter group these 'special' extra challenges designed for the gifted are important.

Appropriate challenge can also be provided for the gifted by having contact with those of comparable ability, and those who have similar interests which, as has been shown, the gifted very much enjoy and which is thus a social as well as an academic need. There was clear evidence of this in the comments of many of the research group, who referred to the extra challenge offered in ability groups. The majority of children in primary and early secondary school are in mixed ability groups, as was the case with the research group. The average ability child, therefore, has ample opportunity to have contacts with those of broadly comparable or of greater ability. For the gifted in such circumstances, there is little opportunity for this and so in the ordinary classroom and especially in small schools, this is a special need for such children. Schools need to be aware of this and try to provide opportunities for such contacts.

The latter problem can be helped by provision of a good wide range of extra-curricular activities. These also provide further opportunities for discovery of gifts and / or interests not previously recognised, to develop these and so help to address the problem of underachievement. Such opportunities could therefore be regarded as a

particular need for those with hidden gifts and talents and who, by implication, are underachieving in those areas.

All children should, if possible, be capable of independent learning. Independence is one of the characteristics of the gifted and they enjoy being allowed and encouraged to be independent in their learning, a fact that emerged very strongly not just within the research group. It has been noted that very able / gifted children are capable of more complex mental functioning than their average peers. It is therefore of great importance for them to be given the independence and encouragement to use these skills in a variety of settings, to be allowed and encouraged to explore the use of their different learning styles, to pursue their special interests and to be allowed to work at their chosen pace, be this a fast pace or involving more in-depth meticulous research. Because of their sophisticated mental functioning they are capable of doing all this with a minimum of direction, something their more average peers could find, at the very least, difficult. This special kind of independence in their learning is especially important or a particular need for the gifted and should be planned and catered for and encouraged by their teachers.

Some of these comments have implications, again, for discovering new skills. It is important that those who are, for example, gifted creative thinkers should have the opportunities and given the independence to discover and develop these. The kind of flexible classroom environment that encourages experimentation, the development of new and different ideas and ways of using their learning and taking intellectual risks will allow discovery and development of such abilities and is therefore a means of helping to guard against underachievement in this respect. So, again, for possible underachievers such opportunities for and encouragement of independent learning is a very important need, particular to them as a group of gifted students.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, some of the students who took part in this research were being given encouragement and opportunities to be independent and imaginative in some of their learning , but there did not seem to be any consistent policy amongst all staff in any of the schools. This was confirmed by various comments in the Ofsted reports. The comment was made in the discussion of the findings that a good consistent policy of providing a programme of planned in-classroom enrichment / extension work was needed, all this a part of that suggested above, designed to provide an appropriate challenge, particular to the gifted, whether identified and recognised or underachieving.

There are needs which are unequivocally exclusive to the gifted, such as time to practise their special skills and talents. Such needs are not common to all children but are attached particularly to giftedness.

### **Final Comments**

The whole picture which emerges from this project is, for me, very interesting. I was concerned to confirm that the perceived educational needs of very able pupils were reflected in this group of fifteen students and from this I hoped to confirm that very able students do have particular needs consequent upon their high ability. However, I am very conscious of the fact that this was a small scale research project, from which generalizations cannot be made. Nevertheless, not just the results of this project, but other experiences, comments, letters I have had during the period of my research, including as an evaluator of the Summer Schools for the gifted and talented, have fully convinced me that these students do have such needs, which should be met.

This view is now supported at government level, and, as noted in the Introduction, the recent DfEE initiative Excellence in Cities (1999) has done much to



raise awareness of the importance of making provision for / meeting the needs of the gifted, with generous financing of various schemes for this and for teacher training. The government intends to extend this scheme in September 2001, to many more secondary schools across the country.

This new support for the cause of the gifted is very positive and encouraging. However, again from recent personal experiences I know that there is still, not least in some areas of the teaching profession, a feeling that very able students do not need any special help or consideration and that the outstandingly able in particular will, without undue effort and with no problems, achieve excellent results. In response to my request to all the students who took part in this project that they would send me their GCSE results, one student sent with her results an unsolicited letter and she has given me permission to quote from this. This student achieved ten A\* in her GCSE exams and writes:

*“Thinking back over the two GCSE years I think you probably interviewed me, and my parents, at a time when the pressures and difficulties of being more able were least apparent. From what I remember, you visited about this time two years ago - near the beginning of the courses, a long way from the exams and when coursework had not been thought about, let alone started. Since then the disadvantages of being able have become very clear.*

*I found, particularly in the second year of GCSEs, that people turned to me for the answers – for help with coursework and in particular help with maths papers. In fact, I spent 90% of some lessons actually going round the classroom explaining things to my friends. Many lessons, from this point of view, seemed rather pointless because (although I enjoy helping people) I really didn’t feel I was learning very much. The whole experience was, in fact, very embarrassing.*

*The second difficulty I had was the pressure I was under to do well. Although some of it was probably imagined, I felt very much that I had to get a certain percentage because “everyone” was expecting me to do so. The weight of expectations made both the mock and the ‘real’ exams very difficult for me. I spent a large proportion of the exam periods feeling sick or actually being so – not, perhaps, the best way to prepare!!*

*I think that the most difficult thing of all, however, was the fact that most people thought that I didn’t have to make any effort to get the results I did. There seemed to be a general opinion that I could just click my fingers and would, automatically, get good marks. I don’t suppose I really minded any of the other comments but, knowing how much work I actually had to put in, these suggestions really upset me.*

*On the positive side the school did do a lot to help the higher ability students. Extra maths revision sessions were arranged after school for about 10 students who were aiming for A\*. A lot of guidance was given on getting high marks in coursework and teachers were available to help after school and at lunchtime every day. Best of all however in maths (for the second half of year 11) I was allowed to move more quickly through the GCSE work and onto some more challenging A-level work when it became obvious the pace was too slow.. . . .*

*Yours sincerely.*

*Student X”*

I rest my case

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CAT	Cognitive Ability tests
DES	Department of Education and Science
DFE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LEA	Local Education Authority
NACE	National Association for Able Children in Education
NAGC	National Association for Gifted Children
NC	National Curriculum
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PSE	Personal and Social Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SATs	Standard Attainment Tests

## APPENDIX I

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### **Letter 1: Letter to Headteacher**

IA Cross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear (Headteacher)

I am working on a project at the University of Warwick, researching into the special educational needs of able children and the extent to which these are being met, both inside and outside the school.

I am now ready to start my 'field work' and I would very much appreciate your permission to do a part of this in ---- School. It would involve interviewing, in depth, three of your most able pupils in Year 10, their parents and their form tutors. I hope to discover how these pupils view their own needs, the extent to which they feel these are being met, and whether or not their views are corroborated by their parents and teachers.

For the pupils and their parents the interviews should last no longer than one-and-a-half hours each at the very outside and would be arranged to suit the convenience of all those involved. Letters would be written to all concerned, inviting participation in the research and, in the case of the parents, also requesting their permission for their children to be involved in the project.

In the case of the form tutors I should like to talk to them initially, with the year tutor, to give them all a little more detail about the project and to seek their help with it. I shall, more specifically, ask for their assistance in identifying four very able pupils, one as a reserve, and in collecting other information about these pupils, such as any available evidence as to the level of their ability. I shall make every effort not to make this too time-consuming an exercise for them. There would also be a final in-depth interview for each of the form tutors of the pupils involved, but this should take no longer than an hour, since a lot of information from them should already be to hand.



There will be a guarantee of confidentiality to everyone who is interviewed. Neither the school nor anybody who participates will be identified by name in the thesis and every effort will be made to ensure that those mentioned are not recognisable. In case there should ever be any question of some of the work being published and bearing in mind that the final thesis will be available in university libraries, I shall, when we meet, seek your permission for any of the material collected from your school to be used, with this guarantee of anonymity. For those who wish, a summary of the findings will be provided.

If you are willing to allow me to carry out a part of the field work study in your school, I will telephone for an appointment to discuss the project with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Eunice D. Phillips.

## Letter 2: Supplementary Letter to Headteacher

1ACross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear (Headteacher)

As promised when we met at the beginning of this week, I am outlining below the anticipated format for the part of my research project to be carried out in ----- School. I look forward to meeting, as arranged, the Year Tutor and Form Tutors of selected Year 10 pupils, on -----.

About a week in advance of this meeting I shall write to the Year Tutor and explain what the research project is all about and ask if the four generally most able pupils in the year group could be selected to take part in the research. I shall enclose letters for the Form Tutors of these pupils, so that they also will know what the project involves.

At the meeting I shall give the Year Tutor and the Form Tutors any further details of the project which they feel they need. I shall also seek from them any available evidence regarding the pupils' high ability, hoping to obtain some non-quantitative as well as quantitative information.

I hope the Form Tutors may be willing to be interviewed for about one hour at a later date, to give me some in-depth information about the selected pupils. I shall give them, in advance, the list of questions which I shall be asking to enable them to collect any information which they may not have about the pupils before the interview.

When I know the names of the pupils involved, I shall send letters to them and their parents explaining what the research involves and requesting their agreement to

participate. This will be done through the Form Tutors which will allow the Form Tutors to give a brief initial explanation as to what the project is all about.

The pupils and parents will be given a choice of time and venue for their separate interviews. I am grateful to you for being willing to allow these interviews to take place in the school, if this is their choice.

Thank you again for your permission to carry out a part of my research in your school.

Yours sincerely,

Eunice D. Phillips.

### Letter 3: Letter to Year Tutor

1A Cross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear (Year Tutor)

I am working at the University of Warwick, researching into the special educational needs of able children and the extent to which these are being met, both inside and outside the school.

I am now ready to start my 'field-work' and have been given permission by (the Headteacher) to do some of this in ----- School. This will involve interviewing, in depth, your three most able pupils in the current Year 10, their parents and their Form Tutors. I hope to discover how these pupils view their own needs, the extent to which they feel these are being met, and whether or not their views are corroborated by their parents and teachers.

I would much appreciate an opportunity to meet and discuss the project in more detail with you. I shall need your help in identifying, if possible in advance of our meeting, your four most able pupils in Year 10, one as a reserve, and in collecting any available evidence about their ability. I would also like to meet the Form Tutors of the nominated pupils, on the same day, to discuss the project very briefly with them too and I enclose a letter for each tutor involved. The date which (the Headteacher) has suggested we could meet is ----- and I hope this will be convenient for everyone. I shall make every effort not to make this too time consuming an exercise for those involved.

There is a guarantee of confidentiality for all those who agree to be involved in the research project. Neither the school nor anyone who participates will be identified

by name in the thesis and every effort will be made to ensure that those mentioned are not recognisable. In case there should ever be any question of some of the work being published, and bearing in mind that the final thesis will be available in universities, I shall, when we meet, seek your permission for any of the material collected from you to be used, with this guaranteed anonymity. For those who wish, a summary of the findings will be provided.

I look forward to meeting you

Yours sincerely,

Eunice D. Phillips (Mrs).

#### **Letter 4: Letter to Form Tutor**

1A Cross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear Form Tutor,

I am working at the University of Warwick, researching into the special educational needs of able children and the extent to which these are being met, both inside and outside the school.

I am now ready to start my 'field-work' and have been given permission by (the Headteacher) to do some of this in ----- School. This will involve interviewing, in depth, three of your most able pupils in Year 10, their parents and their Form Tutors. I hope to discover how these pupils view their own needs, the extent to which they feel these are being met, and whether or not their views are corroborated by their parents and teachers.

I have asked the Year 10 Year Tutor to identify the four most able pupils in the year group, one as a reserve, and to provide other available information about their ability.

I understand that one of the four pupils is in your tutor group and I would much appreciate an opportunity to meet very briefly and discuss the project in more detail with you and the other Year 10 Form Tutors involved. I hope you may also be willing to have an in-depth interview with me about the pupil. This should take an hour at the most, since some of the information I need will already have been provided. I shall make every effort not to make the whole process too time-consuming for you. (The Headteacher) ---- has suggested that we could have our initial meeting on ---- and I hope this will be convenient for you.

There is a guarantee of confidentiality for all those who agree to be interviewed. Neither the school nor anyone who participates will be identified by name in the thesis and every effort will be made to ensure that those mentioned are not recognisable. In case there should ever be any question of some of the work being published, and bearing in mind that the final thesis will be available in universities, I shall, when we meet, seek your permission for any of the material collected from you to be used, with this guaranteed anonymity. For those who wish, a summary of the findings will be provided.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

Eunice D. Phillips (Mrs).

### Letter 5: Letter to Parents

Telephone 01295 768202

1A Cross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear Mr & Mrs -----

I am working on a project at the University of Warwick, researching into the special educational needs of able children and the extent to which these are being met, both inside and outside the school.

I am now ready to start my 'field work' and have been given permission by ----- to do some of this in ----- School. This involves interviewing some pupils in Year 10 who are considered by the school to be very able. I am hoping to discover how these pupils view their own needs, the extent to which they feel these are being met and whether or not their views are corroborated by their parents and teachers.

Your son/daughter has been suggested as one who is viewed as being very able, and I am seeking your permission for him/her to take part in my research project. His/her participation would consist only of an interview lasting for one-and-a-half hours at the very maximum, this to be conducted at a time and venue acceptable to your son/daughter.

As a part of the project it is important that you also take part in the research and this again would involve only an interview, lasting at maximum one-and-a-half hours. This would be arranged to suit your convenience, both in time and place.

There will be a guarantee of confidentiality to everyone who is interviewed. Neither the school nor anyone who participates will be identified by name in the thesis and every effort will be made to ensure those mentioned are not recognisable. In case there should ever be any question of some of the work being published, and bearing in mind that the final thesis will be available in university libraries, I shall, when we meet, seek your permission for any of the material collected from you to be used, with this



guarantee of anonymity. For those who wish, a summary of the findings will be provided.

I would much appreciate your permission for ----- to be involved in my research and also for your agreement to take part in the project. I enclose a stamped addressed envelope for your reply, but should you want more detail about the project please do not hesitate to telephone me, the number is given above. Between 6pm and 7pm any evening is usually a good time to call me.

Yours sincerely,

Eunice D. Phillips. (Mrs)

## Letter 6: Letter to Students

Telephone 01295 768202

1A Cross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear (Student)

I am working on a project at the University of Warwick, researching into the special educational needs of able children and the extent to which these are being met, both inside and outside the school.

I am now ready to start my 'field work' and have been given permission by ----- to do some of this in ----- School. This involves interviewing some pupils in Year 10 who are considered by the school to be very able. I am hoping to discover how these pupils view their own needs, the extent to which they feel these are being met and whether or not their views are corroborated by their parents and teachers.

You have been suggested as one who is viewed as being very able, and I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to take part in my research project. This would involve only an interview lasting for one-and-a-half hours at the very maximum, to be conducted at a venue of your choice and at a time suitable for you.

As well as your agreement to take part I also need your parents permission for you to be involved in the research, and I have written them a letter very similar to this asking for their agreement, and also asking them to participate in an interview.

There will be a guarantee of confidentiality to everyone who is interviewed. Neither the school nor anyone who participates will be identified by name in the thesis and every effort will be made to ensure that those mentioned are not recognisable. In case there should be any question of some of the work being published, and bearing in mind that the final thesis will be available in universities, I shall, when we meet, seek

your permission for any of the material collected from you to be used, with this guaranteed anonymity. For those who wish, a summary of the findings will be provided.

I would much appreciate your agreement to take part in the project. I enclose a stamped addressed envelope for your reply, but should you want more detail about the project please do not hesitate to telephone me, the number is given above. Between 6pm and 7pm any evening is usually a good time to call me.

Yours sincerely,

Eunice D. Phillips. (Mrs)

## **Letter 7: Follow-up Letter to Students**

1A Cross Lane,  
Helmdon,  
Northants NN13 5QL.

Dear (Student)

I have almost completed my thesis on The Special Educational Needs of Very Able Children, and hope to present it in March. The material given to me by the parents and teachers but especially that given by the students has been central to my work and I have quoted several times from each student's interview. I have given every student a pseudonym and have, as promised, done my utmost to ensure that you, your school or those you refer to are not recognisable, although you will, of course, recognise your own comments. So far as I can judge I have succeeded in this but if you feel you would prefer not to be quoted then please let me know and I shall remove your quotes.

I feel I should tell you that, having read the draft of the work containing your comments, my tutor asked if you had all been selected not just for your high ability but also because you were all such delightful young people. I assured him this was not one of the reasons for your selection, but that was the impression he got from your quotes and I was really pleased.

I have also quoted some parents' and teachers' comments but have given no names here, since that might have allowed identification of all concerned, teachers, parents and students. I hope and believe, therefore, that confidentiality is quite secure.

It would be very helpful if I was able to refer to your GCSE results in my thesis, not necessarily individually, but as a general confirmation of the ability of the group of students who took part in the project. If you would be willing to give me your results could you please write them on the bottom of this letter and return it to me. I enclose a stamped addressed envelope for this.

Thank you again for all your help. I hope you are enjoying your A-level course or whatever further studies you are taking.

Yours sincerely,

<u>Subject</u>	<u>grade</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>grade</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>grade</u>
1		2		3	
4		5		6	
7		8		9	
10		11		12	

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX II**

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## **Interview Schedule 1A**

**Student Interview Schedule: to be completed with the researcher**

**Researcher's copy with probes**

### **Part A: Questions relevant to the social and emotional aspects of high ability.**

1. Please tell me a little about yourself as a person and about your school career to date.

- (i) awareness of ability at pre-school / primary / secondary stage
- (ii) response, if any
- (iii) personal characteristics / strengths / weaknesses

2. Who are your best friends?

- (i) one special - ability - in class or not?
- (ii) other pupils in the school - part of wider school group - same class or not?
- (iii) ability of pupils in friendship group
- (iv) length of friendships
- (v) friendships outside school - same or different from in school?
- (vi) Is membership of a friendship group important to you?

3. How are you grouped for lessons in your school?

- (i) advantages / disadvantages of this system socially for you - (e.g. helps / hinders ability / mixed friendships)
- (ii) social need for / advantages of mixed ability groups
- (iii) social need for / advantages of ability grouping

- 4, Given a free choice of how you are grouped, which would you choose as being the easiest for you socially and which the most difficult?
- (i) response to idea of very small ability withdrawal groups - from social aspect
  - (ii) response to idea of working independently within or away from class group - from social aspect
5. How do you feel about and respond to other pupils or friends at school who are not so able as you or who even find learning quite difficult?
- (i) feel rather sorry for them - why ?
  - (ii) get a bit impatient when they are slow to understand something - why ?
  - (iii) try to help them with their work - their response?
  - (iv) avoidance - why ?
6. What sort of open acknowledgements of your achievements are given by the school?
- (i) prizes / awards - general / in class / by subject
  - (ii) achievement lists - general / by subject
  - (iii) announcements at assemblies (iv) other
  - (v) do you mind attention being drawn to you in any of these ways - if so how much?
  - (vi) are they adequate - if not what would help ?
7. How, if at all, does your high ability affect you socially either in or out of school?
- (i) advantages - e.g. in terms of friendship, respect for your ability from peers and others or anything else?
  - (ii) disadvantages - if so are these connected with friendship difficulties; negative attitudes to your ability at any level or anything else?
  - (iii) your response to any of this (emotional reaction / coping)



(iv) any problems not mentioned you could attribute to your high ability? If so how do you cope?

(v) have your tactics changed as you have matured?

8. Have you at any stage discussed any problems you have had with anyone?

(i) someone at home / outside school

(ii) someone in school

9. What, if anything, has been done by anyone, in or out of school, which has been especially helpful to you in resolving / coping with any problems associated with your high ability?

(i) by your parents / someone outside school

(ii) by the school generally or someone in the school

(iii) by both working together - is this important?

10. If you have had no problems of this kind, to what would you attribute this?

(i) atmosphere / ethos or other factor in school

(ii) atmosphere / general support at home / outside school

(iii) both working together - is this important?

(iv) your own basic personality

11. Are there things which teachers tend to do / say related to your high ability which are unhelpful to you?

(i) in your relationships with other pupils

ii) in promoting negative attitudes to you

12. How do you feel generally about your high ability?
- (i) comfortable and self-confident
  - (ii) uncomfortable - would prefer to keep it low-key.
  - (iii) feel fortunate / privileged - any sense of responsibility?
13. Have you taken advantage of any careers advice and guidance offered by the school?
- If so, how much help have you needed?
14. Do you feel that you have time to relax / leisure time to pursue your own interests in and out of school?
15. Are there ways, not so far covered, in which your life in or out of school could be helped socially?
16. How do you feel about school generally?

## **Interview Schedule 1B**

### **Student Interview Schedule: to be completed with the researcher**

#### **Researcher's copy with probes**

#### **Part B: Questions relevant to the curricular / academic aspects of high ability**

1. In terms of the different subjects or different areas of the curriculum how would you assess your own ability?
  - (i) more-or-less even in all areas, including practical, creative arts, sport etc.
  - (ii) stronger in some areas than others
  
2. Have you always given equal attention to all subjects or areas of your curriculum?  
If not what are the reasons for this?
  - (i) variations in facilities / opportunities in school
  - (ii) more / less confidence in specified subjects
  - (iii) motivation varies - if so why?
  - (iv) does it matter if more attention is given to some subjects than others?
  
3. How would you describe your levels of interest and concentration in lessons in school?
  - (i) always alert and interested - concentrate well
  - (ii) alert and interested in some subjects but not in others - not enough challenge
  - (iii) bored stiff most of the time - concentration poor - not enough challenge
  - (iv) in general is there enough challenge for you?

4. Have you been offered opportunities and encouragement to explore and discover any abilities / talents about which you were previously unaware?
- (i) through extra-curricular activities in school
  - (ii) through activities out of school
  - (iii) by any other means
5. When you are studying or learning something new what is your preferred method of approach to your learning?
- (i) lots of guidance and supervision
  - (ii) some guidance and then allowed to work independently and at your own pace
  - (iii) do you enjoy doing your own research?
6. When working through the curriculum generally what is your preferred pace?
- (i) always prefer speed
  - (ii) prefer in-depth in all study
  - (iii) depends on subject - sometimes speed, sometimes in depth preferred.
  - (iv) which is most encouraged in school?
7. In subjects where there are set problems to be solved how do you prefer to tackle these?
- (i) keep to the recommended method and then move on quickly to the next task
  - (ii) try unusual / different methods and approaches to solve the problem
  - (iii) which is most encouraged in school?

8. When tackling problems or new and difficult tasks, if you do not get the 'right answer' or solve the problem to your satisfaction what is your reaction?
- (i) get rather worried / upset about this and feel discouraged from tackling other problems
  - (ii) get impatient with yourself - write it off to experience and get on with the rest of the work / next problem
  - (iii) feel a bit embarrassed
  - (iv) see it as a challenge
  - (v) try to evaluate / assess what went wrong and what you have learnt from the exercise with or without support from the teacher
9. If you find something you are learning very difficult to understand how do you react / respond?
- (i) keep struggling on using different resources / texts to help you
  - (ii) ask someone else for help - most likely whom?
  - (iii) learn the main points by rote and hope this will be adequate for your needs / get you by
10. Do you feel that you are given opportunities and encouragement to be independent and imaginative in your approach to your work in school?
- (i) working at your own pace
  - (ii) in different approaches to solving problems / carrying out set tasks in lessons
  - (iii) in allowing work to be presented work in an unusual / different ways
  - (iv) in pursuing your own / new interests
  - (v) in using your knowledge and learning in new and different ways / contexts
  - (vi) is this important to you?

11. When you are studying by yourself, e.g. doing homework, a GCSE topic or exam revision how do you organise this?

- (i) plan a study programme and keep to it fairly well
- (ii) plan a programme but rarely keep to it
- (iii) keep a daily record of what / how much you have done
- (iv) do not plan closely but are methodical in tackling the necessary work  
tend to leave it to the last minute and then have to attack it with a certain amount of panic

12. Have you been given any advice in school on sensible ways of tackling independent study and research?

- (i) as a specific study skills course
- (ii) from individual subject teachers to the group as a whole
- (iii) individually from a teacher / tutor on an ad hoc basis
- (iv) only by the occasional comment
- (v) other

13. Have you ever actively sought advice on good study habits / skills?

- (i) from anyone in school
- (ii) from anyone outside school
- (iii) is this important - if so why?

14. Are you given time / opportunity in your school to discuss your work and progress with the relevant staff?

- (i) your work, progress and achievements generally

- (ii) your work in individual subject areas
  - (iii) your interest in subjects beyond your set curriculum
  - (iv) is there enough of this and does it matter to you?
15. What opportunities exist in and out of school for contacts with others of similar interests and comparable ability?
- (i) within school - as much as you would like?
  - (ii) outside school - as much as you would like?
  - (iii) is this important to you - if so why?
16. Is there any way not already mentioned that your school has influenced the development of your abilities?
- (i) resources
  - (ii) special facilities / arrangements
  - (iii) other
17. To what extent have your parents, your home background and your environment outside school generally, affected your levels of motivation and achievement?
- (i) resources
  - (ii) siblings      (iii) other
18. Do you have time to study / practise / pursue to your satisfaction, all those things of special interest to you?
19. Is there any factor which has been important to you in your levels of achievement and motivation which has not been covered in the questions asked?

## **Interview Schedule 2A**

### **Parent Interview Schedule: to be completed with the researcher**

#### **Researcher's copy with probes**

#### **Part A: Questions relevant to the social and emotional aspects of high ability**

1. Please tell me a little about your child's early development and school career to date.
  - (i) evidence of high ability pre-school - higher than that of peers e.g. early speech, reading, questioning, preference for adult company etc.
  - (ii) evidence of high ability during school career - higher than that of peers
  - (iii) your child's response and your own response - delight, horror, anxiety
  - (iv) personal characteristics / strengths / weaknesses
  
2. Who are your child's best friends?
  - (i) one special - ability - in class or not?
  - (ii) other pupils in the school - part of wider school group - same class or not?
  - (iii) ability of pupils in friendship group
  - (iv) length of friendships
  - (v) friendships outside school - same or different from in school?
  - (vi) Is membership of a friendship group important to him/her ?
  
3. To your knowledge, does the way in which the school organises the pupils into classes or groups have any effect on your child's relationships with other pupils?
  - (i) advantages / disadvantages of this system for your child socially (e.g. helps / hinders ability / mixed friendships)



- (ii) social need for / advantages of mixed ability groups
  - (iii) social need for / advantages of ability grouping
4. What is your child's attitude to others who are not so able, or even have learning difficulties - including siblings?
- (i) sympathy / tolerance - if so why ?
  - (ii) impatience - why?
  - (iii) willingness to help - their response if known
  - (iv) avoidance - why ?
5. Do you feel that there is appropriate open acknowledgement of your child's achievements in school? If so how, to your knowledge, is this handled?
- (i) prizes / awards - general / in class / by subject
  - (ii) achievement lists - general / by subject
  - (iii) announcements at assemblies
  - (iv) other
  - (v) does he/she mind attention being drawn to him/her in this fashion?
6. If you feel there is not enough open acknowledgement of your child's achievements, what would you like to see being done to resolve this?
7. Are you aware of your child's high ability having any impact on his/her social life either in or out of school?
- (i) advantages e.g. in terms of friendships, respect for his/her ability from peers and others, or anything else?

- (ii) disadvantages - if so are these associated with friendship difficulties, negative attitudes to his/her ability or anything else?
- (iii) your child's response to any of this? (emotional response / coping)
- (iii) any problems not mentioned you feel could be attributed to his/her high ability? If so, to your knowledge how does he/she cope? Has this altered as he/she has matured?

8. Does your child discuss with you any problems he/she may have? If not how are you aware of any problems worrying him/her?

- (i) from a sibling or friend
- (ii) from the school

9. Do you feel that the support / advice you give to your child in coping with such problems has been accepted and has helped towards resolving them?

- (i) a great deal - very close relationship
- (ii) sometimes
- (iii) rarely - more likely to go elsewhere for advice - e.g.?

10. Do you feel that the school gives your child adequate support in coping socially with his/her high ability?

- (i) as much as possible, including liaison with home - good relationships - is this important ?
- (ii) to an extent
- (iii) none

11. If your child has no problems of this kind to what do you attribute this?
- (i) support in the home / upbringing
  - (ii) atmosphere / ethos or other factor in the school
  - (iii) both working together - is this important?
  - (iv) child's own basic personality
12. Has your child taken advantage of any careers advice and guidance offered by the school? If so, how much help has he / she needed?
13. How do you think your child feels generally about his/her high ability?
- (i) comfortable and self-confident
  - (ii) uncomfortable - would prefer to keep it low key - if so why?
  - (iii) feels fortunate / privileged - sense of responsibility
14. How do you feel about having a child who is very able?
- (i) advantages / bonuses
  - (ii) disadvantages / problems
15. Does your child have time to relax / leisure time?
16. Are you aware of any ways, not so far covered, in which your child's life in or out of school could be helped socially?

## **Interview Schedule 2B**

### **Parent Interview Schedule: to be completed with the researcher**

#### **Researcher's copy with probes**

#### **Part B: Questions relevant to the curricular / academic aspects of high ability**

1. Considering the different areas in which people can demonstrate high ability how would you assess your child's high ability'?
  - (i) more-or-less even in all areas, including practical, creative arts, sport etc.
  - (ii) stronger in some areas than others
  
2. Has your child always given equal attention to all subjects or areas of the curriculum? If not are you aware of the reasons for this?
  - (i) facilities / opportunities in the school vary
  - (ii) your child feels more / less confident in specified subjects
  - (iii) motivation varies - if so why?
  - (iv) does it matter if more attention is given to some subjects than others?
  
3. What impression do you have of your child's levels of interest and concentration lessons in school?
  - (i) always alert and interested - concentrates well
  - (ii) alert and interested in some but not in others - not enough challenge
  - (iii) bored stiff most of the time - concentration poor - not enough challenge
  - (iv) in general is there enough challenge for your child?

4. Do you feel that the school offers your child adequate opportunities and encouragement to discover and develop talents / abilities not previously recognised?
- (i) within the classroom
  - (ii) through extra curricular activities - in or out of school hours
  - (iii) by any other means?
5. What opportunities exist out of school for your child to try new activities or to develop existing interests?
- (i) within the home
  - (ii) using facilities in the community
6. How independent is your child in his/her methods of study at home?
- (i) needs initial guidance / help and then happy to work independently
  - (ii) needs a lot of guidance / encouragement / support
  - (iii) enjoys doing own research
7. When working / studying generally what is your child's preferred pace?
- (i) prefers to work quickly
  - (ii) prefers in-depth study
  - (iii) depends on topic
  - (iv) which is most encouraged in school?
8. How does your child usually prefer to tackle problems to be solved?
- (i) tries the one obvious/recommended method and then move on quickly to the next task

- (ii) enjoys trying different / unusual approaches and methods to solve the problem
- (iii) which do you encourage most?
- (iv) do you know if he / she also uses this approach in school?

9. When your child is tackling problems or a new or difficult task and does not get 'right answer' what is his/her reaction?

- (i) gets rather worried / upset and feels discouraged from tackling other problems
- (ii) gets impatient with him/herself - writes it off to experience and gets on with the rest of the work / next problem
- (iii) feels a bit embarrassed
- (iv) sees it as a challenge
- (v) tries to evaluate / assess what went wrong and what he / she has learnt from the exercise

10. How do you encourage / support your child when he/she is tackling difficult problems or tasks and especially if he/she does not succeed?

- (i) advise to try a secure method of tackling the problem
- (ii) encourage 'risk taking' and different approaches - elaborate

11. Do you believe that the school's approach to learning allows the pupils to be independent and imaginative in the way they tackle their work?

- (i) allows to work at their chosen pace
- (ii) encourages different approaches to problem solving / carrying out set tasks
- (iii) allows work to be presented in unusual / different ways
- (iv) encourages use of knowledge and learning in new and different ways
- (v) encourages pursuing of own / new interests

(vi) is this important?

12. When studying independently how does your child organise this?

- (i) plans and keeps to a study programme
- (ii) plans but rarely keeps to it
- (iii) keeps a daily record of what has been covered
- (iv) does not plan closely but does work methodically
- (v) tends to leave it all to the last minute and then tackles it with a degree of panic
- (vi) does his/her approach vary from this during exam revision time?

13. To your knowledge has your child been given advice in school on sensible ways of tackling independent study and research?

- (i) as a specific study-skills course
- (ii) from individual subject teachers to the whole group individually from a teacher / tutor
- (iii) other

14. Has your child ever sought your help / advice on sensible study methods or researching for school topics / projects?

- (i) is this important for your child?

15. Are you and your child given opportunities by the school to discuss his/her work and progress with staff?

- (i) work, progress and achievement generally
- (ii) in individual subject areas
- (iii) in areas / subjects beyond the curriculum

- (iv) are these adequate?
- (v) is this important to you and your child?

16. What opportunities exist for your child to have contact with others of similar interests and comparable ability?

- (i) in school that you know about and in your opinion are there enough?
- (ii) outside school - in your opinion are there enough?
- (iii) is this important to your child?

17. Do you feel that your child has time to study / practise / pursue to his / her satisfaction all his / her special interests?

18. Is there any way not already mentioned that you feel the school, you and your home background and environment or any other factor, has influenced your child's motivation and achievement?

- (i) resources
- (ii) special facilities / arrangements
- (ii) siblings
- (iii) other e.g. encouraging early development of ability - who and how?



## **Schedule 3A**

### **Form Tutor Interview Schedule: to be completed with the researcher**

#### **Researcher's copy with probes**

#### **Part A: Questions relevant to the social and emotional aspects of high ability**

1. Please tell me something about the pupil as a personality and the impact, if any, that this has had on his/her career to date in this school.
  - (i) length and depth of knowledge of pupil - contexts
  - (ii) notable strengths / weaknesses
  - (iii) stage of awareness of high ability
  
2. To your knowledge who are this pupil's best friends?
  - (i) one special - ability - in class or not?
  - (ii) other pupils in the school - part of wider school group - same class or not?
  - (iv) ability of pupils in friendship group
  - (v) outside school friendships - same or different - if different why? - ability
  - (vi) is membership of a friendship group important to him/her?
  
3. Is the class / tutor / other grouping a major factor in determining this pupil's relationships with other pupils?
  - (i) general advantages / disadvantages of the system socially
  - (ii) has promoted friendships across the ability range - is this important for this student socially?
  - (iii) has promoted ability friendships - does this matter to this student socially?
  - (iv) any alternative system which would be better?

4. Have you had any indication of this pupil's attitude to others who are not so able, or even have learning difficulties?
- (i) sympathy / tolerance
  - (ii) impatience - why?
  - (iii) willingness to help - encouraged - response of less able others
  - (iv) avoidance - why?
5. In what ways is open acknowledgement of this pupil's achievements shown in the school?
- (i) prizes / awards - general / in class / by subject
  - (ii) achievement lists - general / by subject
  - (iii) announcements in assemblies
  - (iv) other
  - (v) how does he/she respond to this - does he/she mind attention being drawn to him/her like this?
  - (vi) is the system adequate for this school and student - if not, what would help?
6. Are you aware of this pupil's high ability having any impact on his/her social life'?
- (i) advantages e.g. in terms of friendships, respect for his/her high ability from peers and others, or anything else
  - (ii) disadvantages - if so are these associated with friendship difficulties, negative attitudes to his/her ability, or anything else?
  - (iii) the pupil's response to this (emotional response / coping)
  - (iv) any problems not mentioned which could be attributed to his/her high ability. If so, how does he/she cope?

7. Has this pupil ever discussed with you any problems he/she may have? If not how are you aware of any problems worrying him/her?

- (i) from one of the pupil's friends
- (ii) from a colleague
- (iii) other

8. Do you feel that any support / advice the school has given the pupil in coping with problems has been accepted and has helped towards resolving them?

- (i) a great deal - good rapport / relationships, including home / school - is latter important?
- (ii) sometimes
- (iii) rarely - more likely to go elsewhere for advice - e.g.?

9. To your knowledge does the pupil have adequate support at home in coping socially with his/her high ability?

- (i) as much as possible, including liaison with the school - is this important?
- (ii) to an extent
- (iii) none

10. If this pupil has no such problems to what would you attribute this?

- (i) the home background / upbringing
- (ii) input by the school
- (iii) both working together - has this happened much - does it make a difference?
- (iv) the pupil's own essential personality

11. How do you think this pupil feels generally about his/her high ability?
- (i) comfortable and self-confident
  - (ii) uncomfortable - would prefer to keep it low key - if so do you know why?
  - (iii) feels fortunate / privileged - any sense of responsibility?
12. Has this pupil needed careers advice so far?
- (i) if yes how much?
13. Do you believe that this pupil has enough time to relax / leisure time both in and out of school?
14. Are you aware of any ways, not so far covered, in which this pupil's life in or out of school could be helped socially?

**Footnote:**

On the Form Tutor's copy, consisting of the questions without the probes, since this was distributed in advance of the interview, the following comment was included at the top of Part A of the Schedule:

**To protect the pupil concerned please treat these documents Part A and Part B as highly confidential**

## **Interview Schedule 3B**

**Form Tutor Interview Schedule: to be completed with the researcher**

### **Researcher's Copy With Probes**

#### **Part B: Questions relevant to the curricular / academic aspects of high ability**

1. Does this pupil give equal time and attention to all subjects or areas of the curriculum? If not, are you aware of the reasons for this?
  - (i) facilities / opportunities in the school vary
  - (ii) the pupils feels more / less confident of ability in specified areas
  - (iii) motivation varies - if so why?
  - (iv) other
  
2. How would you describe the pupil's levels of interest and concentration in lessons in school?
  - (i) always alert and interested - concentrates well
  - (ii) alert and interested in some subjects but not in others - reasons if known - challenge
  - (iii) disinterested and difficult to motivate most of the time - reasons if known - challenge
  - (iv) generally enough challenge?
  
3. What sort of encouragement and opportunities are offered by the school for exploring and developing undiscovered talents and abilities?
  - (i) through extra - curricular activities within the school

- (ii) through activities outside school
- (iii) by any other means

4. When the pupil is faced with studying something new what is his/her preferred approach to learning?

- (i) needs lots of guidance and supervision
- (ii) needs some guidance and will then work independently and at own pace
- (iii) enjoys doing own research

5. When working through the curriculum what is the pupil's preferred pace?

- (i) always prefers speed
- (ii) prefers in-depth in all areas
- (iii) depends on subject - sometimes speed sometimes in-depth preferred. Which is given most encouragement?

6. In subjects where there are set problems to be solved how does the pupil prefer to tackle these?

- (i) keeps to the recommended approach and then moves quickly to the next task
- (ii) tries unusual / different methods and approaches to solve the problem - is this encouraged?

7. When tackling problems or new and difficult / challenging tasks, if the pupil does not get the right answer or solve the problem to his/her satisfaction what is his/her response?

- (i) gets worried / upset and feels discouraged from tackling any other problems
- (ii) is rather embarrassed

- (iii) sees it as a challenge - keeps on trying
- (iv) tries to learn from the experience
- (v) gets impatient with him/herself and hurries to tackle a new task

8. What strategies would you use to support pupils when faced with 'failure' in this context?

9. To your knowledge, if the pupil is finding something he/she is learning very difficult to understand, how does he/she respond?

- (i) keeps struggling on using different resources / texts to help
- (ii) asks someone else for help - usually whom
- (iii) inclined to learn the main points by rote and hopes this will get him/her by

10. Given the constraints of time and the pressures of a very full curriculum, is there opportunity in lessons to allow and even encourage the pupils to be independent and imaginative in their approach to their work in school?

- (i) working at their own pace
- (ii) using different approaches to solving problems / carrying out set tasks in lessons
- (iii) presenting work in new and unusual ways
- (iv) in pursuing own / new interests
- (v) using their knowledge and learning in new and different ways / contexts

11. Does the school offer advice on sensible ways of tackling independent study and research?

- (i) as a specific study skills course
- (ii) from individual subject teachers to the group as a whole

- (iii) individually from a teacher / tutor on an ad hoc basis
- (iv) only by the occasional comment on request

12. To your knowledge has the pupil ever sought advice in school on good study habits / skills?

13. What structures exist within the school for pupils and their parents to discuss work and progress with relevant staff?

- (i) work, progress and achievements generally
- (ii) work in individual subject areas
- (iii) interests in subjects beyond the set curriculum
- (iv) are these structures adequate?

14. What opportunities exist in the school for the pupil to have contact with others of similar interests and comparable ability?

- (i) within or outside the classroom
- (ii) is this important to this pupil?

15. Is there any way not already mentioned in which the school, the home background and environment or any other factor not so far covered, has influenced the pupil's motivation and achievement?

- (i) resources
- (ii) special facilities / arrangements
- (iii) other



### **APPENDIX III**

Table V	Awareness of Ability, Its Consequences and Coping	354
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Table V: Awareness of Ability, Its Consequences and Coping			Early and current awareness of ability					Social advantages / feelings about high ability								
			early awareness			awareness now		advantages		feelings						
			late primary school SATS results	secondary school other tests	credited to other things even across subjects	some special strengths	helps relationships	academic advantages	other advantages	proud of ability	uncomfortable	feels fortunate / values	feels responsible	does not feel responsible		
Alexa	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Amy	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fiona	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lisa	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Margaret	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Naomi	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sara	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alan	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Andrew	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Christopher	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gareth	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greg	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ian	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Richard	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thomas	parent/s	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ = pupil response  
✓ = parent response  
✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
X = no or generally negative response

P = previously or earlier in career

Key:

✓ = pupil response  
✓ = parent response  
✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
X = no or generally negative response

P = previously or earlier in career



Table V continued: Awareness of Ability, Its Consequences and Coping			Social disadvantages, coping skills and awards																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																													
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Key:

✓ = pupil response  
✓ = parent response  
✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
x = no or generally negative response

P = also in previous years



Friendships and friendship groups, interpersonal relationships												
friendships			working groups			relationships						
Table VI: Social Relationships	same or more best	friendship group	small withdrawal	independent work	mixed ability benefits	ability group benefits	prefers mixed ability	response to less able	general relationships	leadership skills	likes / enjoys leading	relates well to adults
	one or more best	friendship group	small withdrawal	independent work	mixed ability benefits	ability group benefits	prefers mixed ability	response to less able	general relationships	leadership skills	likes / enjoys leading	relates well to adults
	one or more best	friendship group	small withdrawal	independent work	mixed ability benefits	ability group benefits	prefers mixed ability	response to less able	general relationships	leadership skills	likes / enjoys leading	relates well to adults
	one or more best	friendship group	small withdrawal	independent work	mixed ability benefits	ability group benefits	prefers mixed ability	response to less able	general relationships	leadership skills	likes / enjoys leading	relates well to adults
	one or more best	friendship group	small withdrawal	independent work	mixed ability benefits	ability group benefits	prefers mixed ability	response to less able	general relationships	leadership skills	likes / enjoys leading	relates well to adults
Alexa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Amy parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fiona parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lisa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Margaret parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Naomi parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sara parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alan parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Andrew parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Christopher parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gareth parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greg parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ian parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Richard parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thomas parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key:

✓ = pupil response  
✓ = parent response  
✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
✗ = no or generally negative response

A = academic benefits also noted  
R = reservations  
S = is shy on occasions  
W = is working on this



Table VII:  
Student Support

Student support	Support sources																		Response				Legend																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																										
	school first		parents first		sibling first		friend first		social support		parents view		lots of subject support		alright general		parents view		home / school		knows career		has idea of		does not know		has used school		influence parents		parents and		home + schools		not enough		too much		enough but		enough		parental pressure																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																						
	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																			
Alexa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key:  
 ✓ = pupil response  
 ✓ = parent response  
 ✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
 ✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
 X = no or generally negative response

H = will need help  
 I = could improve  
 L = would like more time to read  
 R = resources good X need more







Table VIII Continued: Balanced Curriculum and Challenge			Fear of failure/asking for help/rote learning			Balance in the curriculum			
	failure			asking for help			learning by rote		
	failure			asking for help			learning by rote		
	failure			asking for help			learning by rote		
	experienced failure	fears failure	first tries on own	will seek teachers' help	never	as last resort	present subjects yes	not necessarily	Equal attention all subjects
Alexa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Amy parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Fiona parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lisa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Margaret parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Naomi parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sara parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Alan parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Andrew parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Christopher parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Gareth parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greg parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ian parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Richard parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Thomas parent/s teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Key:

✓ = pupil response

✓ = parent response

✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response

✓ = not certain but thinks yes

✗ = no or generally negative response

G = general fear of failure

S = specific fear of failure

Key:

✓ = pupil response  
 ✓ = parent response  
 ✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
 ✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
 ✗ = no or generally negative response

G = general fear of failure  
 S = specific fear of failure







**Table IX continued:  
Intellectual  
Independence**

	Allowed / encouraged to be independent and imaginative										Study skills and habits		
	pursue own new interests		unusual presen- tation of work		different ways		school's general response		important to students		advice sought		advice given and plan- ning
	allow/encourage depends/varies	not encourage depends/varies	allow/encourage depends/varies	not encourage depends/varies	encourages not encourages	depends/varies not encourages	not encouraged varies	yes likes not encouraged	to an extent not important	advice in school	study skills of value sought	mostly organised not very organised	
Alexa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Amy parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fiona parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lisa parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Margaret parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Naomi parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sara parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alan parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Andrew parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Christopher parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gareth parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greg parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ian parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Richard parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thomas parent/s teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key:  
 ✓ = pupil response  
 ✓ = parent response  
 ✓ = teacher response

✓ = yes or generally positive response  
 ✓ = not certain but thinks yes  
 X = no or generally negative response

A = would ask first  
 L = not in lessons  
 N = but not enough  
 O = other than from teachers / school